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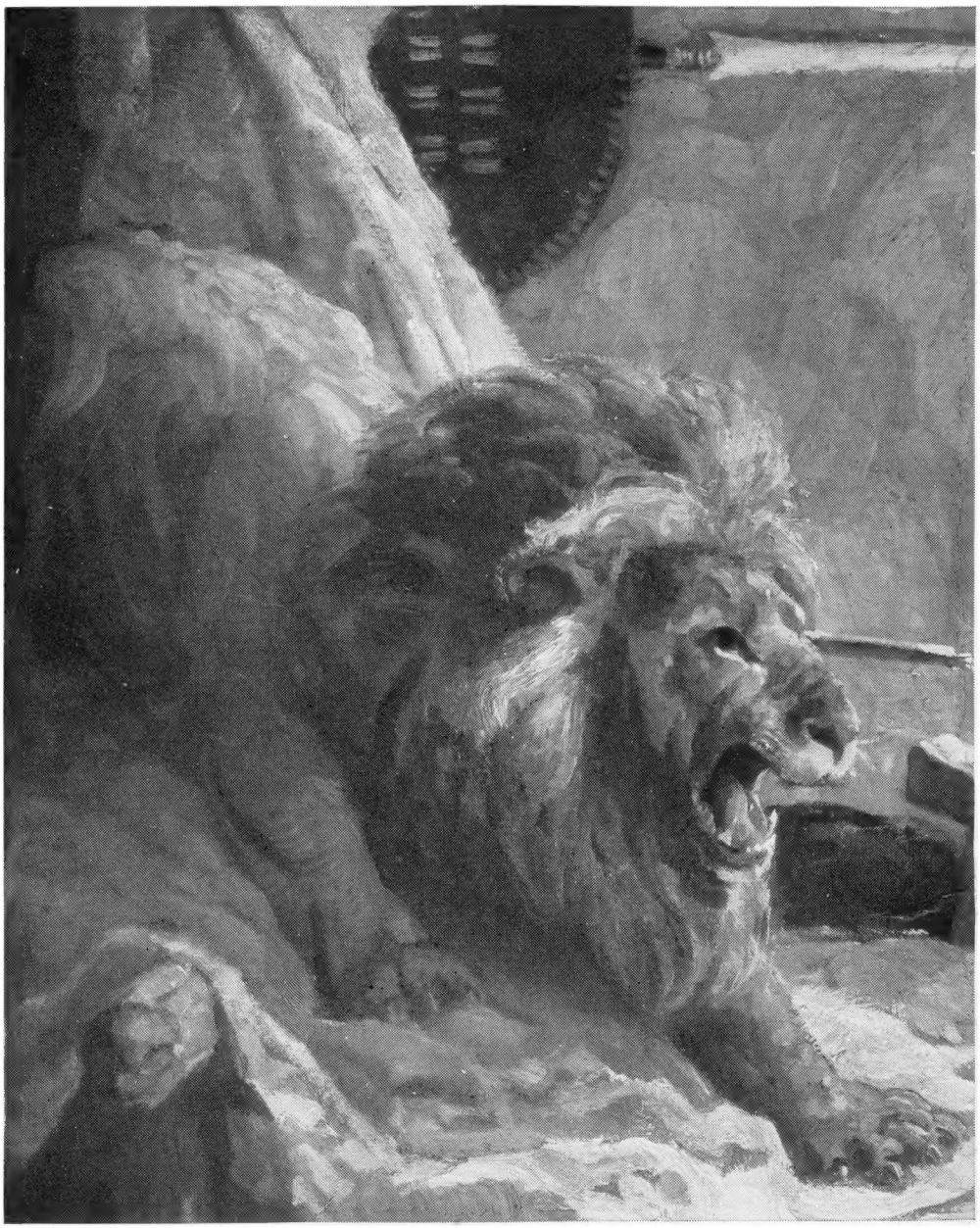

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Frontispiece: "Men Who Won the West—Jim Bridger." Drawn by Paul Lehman.

Two Fascinating Serials

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The climax of this greatest of the famous Tarzan romances is exciting indeed. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

All the Brave Rifles By Clarke Venable 94
Colonel Bowie and many another famous frontiersman live again in this fine story of old days in Texas. (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

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MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1929

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A Swift-moving Novelette

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Edgar Rice Burroughs

The author of the Tarzan stories and of "Tanar of Pellucidar," which begins in the next issue, is—a regular fellow. He lives on a ranch—Tarzana Ranch—in California, and devotes his spare time to raising hogs and blooded horses. But chiefly he is occupied in producing the extraordinary and fascinating romances which have won for him a unique place among the writers of the world. And it is the best of these which leads our next, the March, issue under the title—

"Tanar of Pellucidar"

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 48 FEBRUARY 1929 No. 4

Tanar of Pellucidar

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

A WORLD both fascinating and terrible, at once beautiful, mysterious and challenging: that was the world to Columbus and those who lived before him. Who ventured beyond his own small country dared the perils of unknown seas, savage men, monstrous beasts—and whatever unthinkable abyss that was the jumping-off place. We have gained immeasurably much since then; and we have suffered a certain loss—loss of the mystery, romance and fascination which made that unknown world, uncomfortable though it was, a place of glamour.

That ancient world of glamour is, essentially, what Edgar Rice Burroughs restores to us in the marvelous story which begins in these pages next month. Through the magic of the splendid imagination that gave you Tarzan, he creates for you that world anew—not in the dim past but in the living present, in the supposedly hollow core of this our earth.

It is indeed a startling world that Tanar lives in—a world of perilous seas and faëry lands forlorn; of the cave-bear and the saber-toothed tiger; of the Buried People, a strange half-blind savage folk who dwell in caves; of those able intrepid seamen the Korsarians, who sail far and harry many a distant coast; of the Place of Awful Shadow, and of many another strange region and people such as only a really *creative* writer could evolve. And the adventures of Tanar in this glamorous world are swift and breath-taking as those of Tarzan himself.

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THIS story begins in the next, the March, issue of the BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. With it will appear a stirring novelette of Western adventure by Rollin Brown, the first of a fine new group of Foreign Legion stories by Warren H. Miller, who is himself now back in the Sahara getting his material fresh and authentic; a new "Easy Street Experts" story by Bertram Atkey; the dramatic conclusion of Clarke Venable's fine frontier novel "All the Brave Rifles;" a specially good actual-fact wolf story by Arthur H. Carhart and Stanley Young; a memorable tale of the Free Lances in Diplomacy by Clarence Herbert New—and many other engaging stories by the ablest writers of vivid, vigorous and wholesome fiction.

In this March issue, too, will be five more of the Real Experiences which our readers have made so interesting to each other.

—The Editors

Drawn by Paul Lehman

MEN WHO WON THE WEST

Jim Bridger—Trapper

THE demand for beaver-pelts was in its day one of the most powerful of all factors in the opening up of the West. And many of the first explorers were primarily concerned in finding new beaver country. Typical of these extraordinarily hardy and courageous men was Jim Bridger of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company—a trapper par excellence who roamed the Rockies for many years and whose adventures would require volumes to describe.

Bridger was what today would be called hard-boiled: in order to retain his scalp on his head, he had to be. A characteristic adventure with the Blackfeet nearly ended his career on one occasion: Bridger and his fellow trappers had purposely led a rival party astray after the rivals had refused to divide the territory. Shortly afterward, on the upper Missouri, Bridger and his men ran into a large party of Blackfeet. Peace overtures were made; Bridger rode out alone to meet the Blackfoot chief, but at the last instant as he was extending his hand, some whim of caution led Bridger to cock his rifle. Instantly the Indian seized it by the barrel and strove to twist it away—and after Bridger had received two arrows in his back from the chief's supporters, he lost the gun and was knocked unconscious. And yet—he survived to fight many another day and to explore many another wilderness.

The RIGHT GUY

By MICHAEL J. PHILLIPS

A remarkably vivid, dramatic and impressive story by the able writing-man who gave us "Salome Where She Danced" and other well-remembered stories.

Illustrated by Ralph Frederick

SIX o'clock, and dusk, hastened by low-hanging clouds, settled on the fat little county-seat town of Derby. Rain slanted down briskly, soft, dark lances except where the lights turned it to pencils of diamonds.

There were few people on the street, and already the stores were closing. An unaccustomed glow came from behind the curtained windows of the Derby National Bank. Extra work to do, for this was the last day of the month, with the books to be balanced, and tomorrow was payday for the three hundred employees of the sugar factory, who cashed their checks here.

In front of the bank stood a low, curtained car, its engine running. A vagrant beam dimly lighted the front seat, and showed Grunt Waisler, a little man wearing a peaked cap, who squatted low behind the wheel. An unlighted cigarette drooped from his lip. He looked unwaveringly toward the bank, his eyes narrowed in an anxious squint. One hand rested on the steering-wheel; the other was thrust deep into his right-hand coat pocket.

Sharp, barking explosions, and the bank door flew open. Two men, framed in the light, backed out and down the single step to the sidewalk. First, a broad, thick person with legs too short for his powerful torso, a black mask on his face, a pistol in one hand, a straw suitcase in the other.

Behind, covering the retreat, came a tall, powerfully built figure, an automatic in his right hand, a black leather bag in the other. A bandana concealed his face. His pistol spat streams of fire into the bank's interior, whence came cries, stumbling sounds and a misdirected return fusillade, which shattered the plate-glass windows.

There was an accent to the gesture of the big man, a dramatic something as though he acted a part on the stage. He kept his head up and back. Occasionally he raised his pistol, to bring it down with the whipping motion of a frontier bad man, and fire again.

At that moment the town marshal of Derby came around the corner from the side street just beyond the bank. The automobile, twenty feet distant, was pointed away from him. The two men were halfway across the sidewalk. He carried an old-fashioned heavy-calibered revolver.

But it was easy to get at, and he was game, and a good shot. He fired at the squat figure in the lead. The bandit's pistol clattered to the wet concrete. He seemed leisurely to telescope. Then he swayed forward, settled to the walk and lay in a semicircle, his arms clasping his stomach.

HIS comrade fired twice, very quickly. The town marshal fell, but raised himself on his elbow. As he aimed his weapon the big man stooped, swept the suitcase up with his gun-hand and flung himself into the seat of the waiting automobile.

The engine roared and the car dived forward, leaving a cloud of blue exhaust smoke to dissolve in the light from the open bank door. The marshal emptied his gun from his painful and sprawling position. Bullets pierced the body of the car, but missed its occupants and the vulnerable equipment of gasoline tank and tires.

Breathing heavily, the big man removed the concealing bandana and tossed it into the tonneau along with the bags. He took

a fresh clip of cartridges from his pocket and reloaded his automatic.

His companion, tensely humped over the wheel, gave himself to the business of driving at terrific pace through the rainy night. The car, except for the urgent beat of its engine, offered little aid to the demoralized citizens of Derby who, precious minutes late, would frantically organize pursuit.

Purposely, the tail-light had been disconnected, and only the dimmers were on in front, so that from a little distance the car was nothing but a rapidly diminishing noise. The darkness and rain absorbed the feeble light.

To drive at sixty miles or more was not, under the circumstances, as hazardous as it seemed. The driver knew his car. There were chains on all four wheels. And he had covered this route at the same break-neck speed for three successive evenings.

Almost at once they whizzed across the intersection of another paved road, and the big man laughed in jeering elation. "That gives the hicks three guesses instead of one," he pointed out, "when they get around to chase us." He glanced back; there was no pursuing light.

The driver echoed his mirth. "There's a cross-roads about every mile," he gloated, in a high, unpleasant voice. "It'll take 'em an hour to patch the wires. Pretty soft, so far, big boy." The car fled like a projectile, to the tune of a continuous clicking of its chains.

"Wonder if that hay constabule blotted out Pell?" asked the driver, presently.

"I guess he did. Not so good when they double up that way," returned the other. He laughed shortly. "But not so bad here. A two-way split for us instead of three."

"If he lives we'll have to stake him to fall money," complained the driver in his high voice. "And if he croaks his woman'll want a divvy."

"Is that so?" barked the big man. "He's out of luck unless he's got a couple grand of his own laid away for fall money. I'd like to see any skirt shake me down for a wad I went out and battled for. They don't get a thin dime out of me; none of 'em. See?"

This was contrary to the ethics of their own particular underworld, and they both knew it. The smaller—and weaker—man attempted to justify their callousness by shifting the burden of decision to his colleague.

"The gang'll yell, Pipe," he objected.

"Let 'em," growled the other. "I play my own hand. Any splittin' is out o' your half."

"How do you get that way?" came the resentful retort. "I guess I earned mine! They was shootin' at me as well as at you, remember."

"Then shut up," advised the other ungraciously.

The driver mulled over the rebuff sullenly for a little time. But he could not keep still when a subject of fascinating speculation rested in the tonneau within reach of his hand. "Wonder how much we got?" he ventured.

"Oh, eight or ten grand," guessed Pipe, with affected carelessness, though exhilaration shook his tones. "Maybe more. I grabbed one bundle of hundred-casers, myself. And Pell had some good pickin's. He went into the vault. I cleaned off the counters. The poor boobs had it stacked around—" He broke off to exclaim: "Now, what does that guy want?"

AT the next intersecting highway a few hundred yards ahead a car stood at right angles to their course, its headlights sweeping the road on which they were traveling. "They can't be waitin' for us! What wised 'em?" He looked to the rear, but if pursuit had been organized, it was on the wrong road, or distanced.

"Maybe we missed a wire," suggested the driver, a quaver in his high voice. Driving expertly with his left hand, he brought up a weapon with the right.

"We didn't miss anything," snarled Pipe. "Unless it might be a radio—"

"No broadcasting station there," interrupted the other, positively. "It's just some bird who's got a puncture or something."

"I'll flatten him along with his tire when we go by," announced Pipe, savagely. He peered through the rain-blurred windshield.

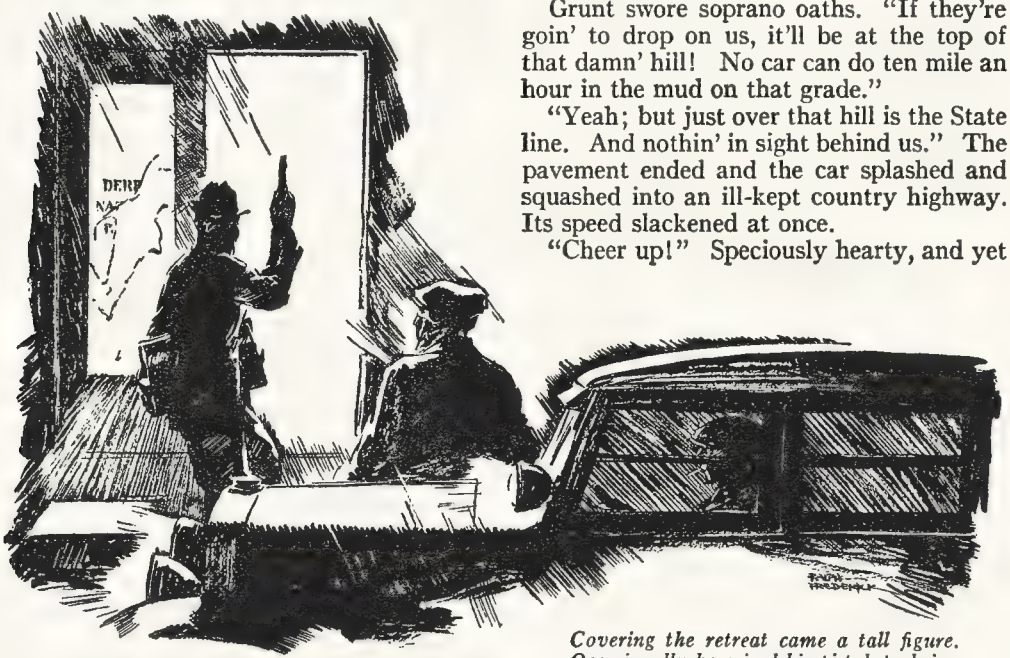
"And tell the world which road we took!" bugled his companion. "It'd be a boob trick to start anything. If they're after us, you'll get all the shootin' you want. But let them start it."

The wisdom of this was so obvious that Pipe made no reply. A few moments later their car rushed across the intersection. For the fraction of a second the headlights dazzled them. Inspirationally, Pipe dropped his gun out of sight before that moment came.

Leaning out to look back, he noted with

satisfaction that Waisler guessed correctly. The occupants of the other vehicle had troubles of their own. There was no movement in pursuit. And still no headlights of Derby cars.

The black road unrolled before them out of the night as they fled. Twice they passed through hamlets. Waisler paid these towns the compliment of switching on the headlights to full power and cutting down his speed to a respectable twenty-five miles.



Covering the retreat came a tall figure. Occasionally he raised his pistol, to bring it down with a whipping motion and fire again.

The precautions, however, seemed needless. Few were abroad in the storm, and these few were not interested in the commonplace car which, curtained against the rain, tooled along so conservatively.

TWENTY minutes had passed since the last shot cracked flatly behind them by the bank, when Grunt broke the silence which had endured for a good half of the journey.

"Which way?"

Pipe turned his head sharply to look at him. "You know which way," he snapped. "Straight ahead."

The high voice became a whine. "We're off the pavement in another minute. The rain has made that hill road soft. We may get stuck."

"Forget it," Pipe advised, contemptuously.

But his companion couldn't forget it. "If we turn east, in a couple hours we'll be in the Big Town," he pointed out, even more querulously. "If we head west, we're O. K., too. We can reach Bradley or Seaverville, or Joe's hangout at Wilsonburg."

"Straight ahead," repeated Pipe, imperturbably.

Grunt swore soprano oaths. "If they're goin' to drop on us, it'll be at the top of that damn' hill! No car can do ten mile an hour in the mud on that grade."

"Yeah; but just over that hill is the State line. And nothin' in sight behind us." The pavement ended and the car splashed and squashed into an ill-kept country highway. Its speed slackened at once.

"Cheer up!" Speciously hearty, and yet with wicked force, Pipe struck his companion between the shoulders. "Pretty near the State line, kid."

The driver cursed sharply, his long upper lip writhing away from long yellow teeth, so that his profile was curiously like that of a cornered rat. "Cut it out, you big mutt!" He sawed at the wheel to keep the floundering car in the track. The road was a soggy, slithery mass. "State line, State line!" he mimicked, in a furious falsetto. "That's all I been hearin' for a month."

"That's enough," grunted Pipe.

"How long since State lines have stopped the bulls? We cracked a bank, didn't we? And maybe you"—his emphasis was sinister—"rubbed out that town marshal."

But Pipe's good humor remained undisturbed. He merely smiled tolerantly. Presently Grunt returned to the charge.

"Why couldn't we 'a' followed the pavement through Williamston?" he demanded.

"You're headin' south, and that'd take us south. Good roads all the way, too."

"Ten miles farther to the State line, you poor fish," retorted Pipe. "Besides, Williamston's a big city. Something might happen; we'd be picked up for havin' no tail-light, or drivin' too fast. And I'm known there. "Now,"—as he talked his eyes swept the wooded sides of the road up which they labored,—"we're safe."

They crawled past the white-painted marker which indicated the invisible line separating the two commonwealths. Pipe relaxed and dropped his pistol into its holster. "Safe!" he repeated. "Safe as though you were under your own bed, Grunt. We'll never serve a minute for that job, if they nick us tomorrow."

"But why—why?" queried the rat-faced driver. His voice rose almost to a scream. "What you holdin' out for? I'm in on this, aint I? What makes us safe?"

Evidently the dramatic instinct surged. "Let me handle this thing right. You'll get more of a kick out of it when I do spill it, Grunt. Boy, it's goin' to be good!"

AT precisely the moment that the bandits' automobile dropped over the line into his State, Governor Oliver Brady closed the door of the executive mansion in the capital city, thirty miles away, and unfurled his umbrella against the chill beating of the rain.

He walked briskly through the handsome park which occupied two city blocks and which separated the Governor's residence from the Capitol. The imposing structures of gray sandstone faced each other across the long rectangle of the park.

Lights blazed here and there in the statehouse, but most windows were dark, for the day's work was done. The Governor mounted the steps to the main floor, and entered his suite, three large rooms opening from the right of the corridor.

The outer door stood ajar. He crossed the public reception-room, and the buffer apartment in which clerks and stenographers worked during the day. From this he entered his private office.

It was thickly carpeted, high-ceilinged, ornate. From the walls of this and the connecting rooms paintings of his predecessors stared down. Steam cracked in the gilded radiators below the large windows.

Governor Brady seated himself at the flat-topped mahogany desk, ruffled his hair comfortably, and lighted a cigar. "Well, son, how you coming with that thing?" he asked.

Corwin Fitch, his secretary, raised a clean-cut, intelligent face from the typewriter at a desk in the corner. In the machine were multiple thin sheets, alternating with carbon. "Fine," he replied. "I'll be done in a few minutes, sir."

"That's good." The Governor pulled out the arm rest on the left-hand side of his desk, leaned back in his swivel-chair, and hoisted his feet. "That hot bath certainly picked me up. We'll have a bite when you finish and then maybe tackle the irrigation project."

"I have a better plan than that, sir," smiled the younger man. "There's a corking good show at the Capitol Theater—'Queens and Quarterbacks.' Suppose we take that in? You've been working pretty hard, you know. There's no rush about the irrigation matter."

The Governor regarded him quizzically. "Think we've earned our salaries today?"

"I certainly do, sir!"

"How about the tickets; you buy 'em?"

The secretary grinned. "No; I didn't. They're passes."

"Sounds like bribery or something," observed the Governor, blowing smoke rings. "I'm afraid you're spoiling me, young fellow. I don't feel a bit like working now. But I do feel like eating. My wife's out to a club meeting; we'll go to a restaurant. Can't you finish that thing afterward?"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir. The newspaper gang's waiting for it. They want to get it off early. Your first veto of the session's pretty important."

"Oh, all right, then." The Governor took up the evening paper and looked through its pages. Presently, when Corwin, with a sigh of finality, pulled the flimsy sheets from the typewriter, Brady asked abruptly: "Son, how'd you like to go to Washington?"

"Wonderful!" The secretary looked up eagerly. "Is it all settled?"

BRADY rose, closed the door to the center office; opened a door leading to a transverse corridor from the private office, and looked out; closed it again and returned to his chair before speaking.

"Well, practically. Thorne sent Milligan to say he wont make the Senate fight if I'll keep hands off here in the State—in other words, if I don't attempt to name my own successor."

The squat figure swayed forward. His comrade fired twice, very quickly.

"He knows he couldn't beat you for Senator!" Corwin declared scornfully.

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Governor Brady. "He has a following. He's a good organizer. With him in it would be an expensive scrap. With him out—"

"Why, it's a walk-away, sir! You're sure of the nomination. And that's the same as election."

"Well, it seems so—unless there's a slip-up. And the only things you can be sure of in politics are slip-ups. But, anyway, it looks good from every angle. So I told Milligan I'll play."

"That's corking, Governor!"

"Thorne's a cold-blooded proposition. I never could see him, any more than he could see me. But he's honest; and he's got money. He'll put a lot of brains, and all his time, into this business of being Governor. Yes, it's good from every angle. My wife will like it in Washington. I have a sort of sneaking idea I will, myself."

"The Senate's a great stepping-stone," nodded the young secretary, wisely.

Governor Brady laughed. "I like your nerve, son. Somehow, I feel being a senator is a mighty big job. There are less than a hundred of them, you know. That gives a fellow who gets there the honor of being one out of a million." Quite unexpectedly, tears stood in his eyes. His voice trembled a little when he went on: "A pretty good job, son, for the product of an orphan asylum."

"It's not a big enough job for *you,* sir! You're going farther than that!"

The Governor chuckled. "Somehow, or another, young fellow," he accused, in his usual quizzical tone, "I think you're a biased prophet."

THE range of hills separating the two States is only about three miles in width, and the bandit car negotiated the distance in a few minutes. At times there was dubiety, for the torrential rainfall had washed the road down to its skeleton of rocks and these tilted the car in dangerous fashion.

Then level places acted as traps for vast quantities of mud, which rose almost to the running-boards and clogged the wheels. But the chains, after spinning violently, always bit to the solid surface beneath, and the car won through to the flat lands below.

"Now where?" asked Grunt, when he felt the pavement beneath their wheels once more, and the car gathered speed from the urging of a heavy foot.

"State Capitol," returned his companion, briefly.

With an oath the driver disconnected the driving mechanism and clapped on the brakes. The car rasped and slid to a standstill. "Guess again!" he snarled, in his hysteric voice. "You aint satisfied with buckin' harness bulls and sheriffs. You gotta run right into the guns of the state police—beggin' 'em to make the pinch! If there's one place I aint goin' it's to the Capitol!"

Pipe's merciless hand reached for his companion's thin upper arm. His fingers closed like jaws and the pain, in spite of himself, made Grunt wince. The big man, though that wayward streak of the dramatic still insisted on recognition, had another motive now for keeping on his course.

Here was rebellion—a challenge to his

leadership. Stubbornness revealed itself in the angle of his jaw as he thrust his head forward.

"You're goin' there and nowhere else but!" he growled. "They're patchin' the wires. If we don't get there, we're sunk. And if you hang around here beefin', we wont get there. Maybe the word's goin' out right now. First thing you know, some bimbo'll shoot the tires out from under us. If we can get to the statehouse we're all right."

"How do I know we're all right?" whined Grunt.

"I'm tellin' you." Pipe turned the look of his pale blue eyes on the sullen and resentful Grunt. "That's all you need to know. I'm runnin' this show. I found the crib. I planned the job. I'm dopin' the get-away. Let's go!"

HE released his hold on Grunt's arm with the effect of a shove. His masterfulness overcame the objections of the smaller man who, muttering and cursing, put the car viciously in gear, and once more fled southward.

Another village, through which they passed decorously, and then on the horizon ahead appeared a vast, diffused glow—the lights of the capital city.

"Easy," commanded Pipe, as they entered the suburbs. "Keep along this street till we get to Twenty-Fifth. Then turn to the right. That'll bring us to the big stone house."

Both men sat tense and silent as the car rolled along the almost deserted highways. The rain, driven by a capricious wind, fell heavily. Few cars and fewer pedestrians were abroad. None challenged them. The one policeman whom they saw was muffled in waterproof garments. Seemingly he was not interested in curtained cars, for he gave them only a casual glance.

They passed the executive mansion, traversed the street bordering the park, in which the majestic elms tossed mournfully their bare limbs, and came to a halt opposite the capitol building.

"O. K.!" Pipe stepped out, opened the door of the tonneau, and wriggled his way into its gloomy interior. "Give me ten minutes, Grunt, and I'll come back with the right steer. Then we'll tuck this stuff away and find a hangout for a couple weeks till we figure what to do. Maybe the bulls'll take us in. But if they do, it'll only be a bluff. We're all set, now—when I find the right guy. And from what I know of the way he works, it wont be hard to find him."

As he talked he worked. First he raised the bulging suitcase to the seat beside him and opened it. Then he thrust the packages of currency which it contained into the capacious bag. He left in the suitcase only a few hundred dollars in clinking gold and silver.

SILENCE in the front seat, a silence broken only by quick, irregular breaths drawn agitatedly through the narrow nostrils in Grunt's long, thin nose. Pipe looked up. His companion's face was silhouetted against the glow from the dashlight. The lips were drawn back from the rodent teeth; the prominent eyes popped. The man's rudimentary chin quivered.

Twice he essayed to speak before the words came forth in a choking whisper, far more impressive than his previous high-pitched utterances: "Whatcha doin' with that coin?"

Pipe thrust his automatic against the other's jugular vein, his gesture as swift as the stroke of a panther. "Bring up your mitts—empty!" he ordered, in a deadly undertone.

Grunt essayed to face him down, but could not. The slaty, furtive eyes wavered and dropped.

"Put 'em on the back of the seat, where I can see 'em. Now keep 'em there. Don't you make a crooked pass, or it'll be a one-way split. Get me? All right.

"I'm taking the roll with me. I tell you I'll only be gone a little while. But I've got to fix things. If I left this stuff, you'd fade with it."

"Half of it's mine." The whine, subdued, but nevertheless the unmistakable sign of defeated acquiescence, had come back into Grunt's voice.

"If you had that and the car, you'd duck. I'll put us both in the clear if you don't gum things. But if you start off alone, they'll get you and the little scheme I've framed goes blooey.

"I know you, Grunt; you'd squawk. And then they'd have to slough me, too."

"Let me come with you."

Pipe grinned. "Nix. If you could leave your face outside, I might. But anyone who saw that mug would call a cop before he thought. Sit right where you are, kid."

"How do I know you'll come back?" Grunt queried, despairingly.

"You poor boob, I just told you! I can't save myself without savin' you." He stepped out of the car, the well-filled bag in his hand, and walked confidently to the statehouse and up the steps. . . . .

The door of the Governor's private office opened quietly. Governor Brady looked up; so did Corwin Fitch. They continued to stare, with something of the same appreciation they would have bestowed upon an effective theater set.

A tall man stood framed in the doorway. He slouched against one side in a posture of exaggerated ease, right shoulder against the jamb, the flat of his left hand against the opposite side, well up to the top. His right leg was crossed over his left, which bore the weight of his body. From his right hand dangled a bulky bag.

A soft hat was drawn low on his slanting forehead. His face, with but few prominent features, nevertheless had a certain daunting symmetry of its own. There was about him such an air of force, ruthless and confident, that the men in front of him noted with surprise that the thick hair above his ears was almost white.

"Evening, Gov!" He ducked his head slowly, in the impudent parody of a deferent and respectful bow.

He came inside, closed the door leisurely behind him, and seated himself, uninvited, in a chair near by it, and perhaps a dozen feet from the desk at which the Governor sat. The bag he placed between his feet. Then he settled back insolently, elbows on the arms of the chair, while he wriggled his back into the comfortable softness of the upholstery.

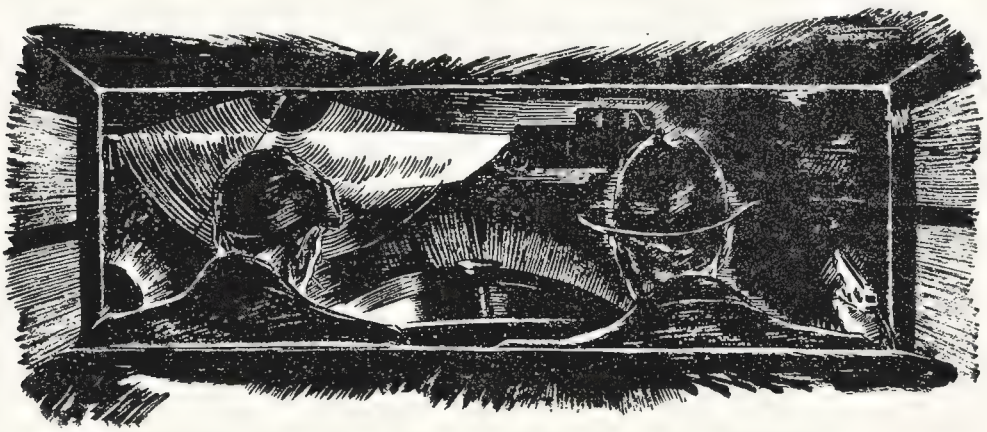
No one could be, apparently, more at his ease, more at home. And yet the fact that he chose this seat, immediately beside the exit, and made no attempt to bring it forward, somehow hinted that he was not so confident as he appeared to be.

The Governor looked at him unsmilingly. As a man who prepares himself for conflict he straightened in his chair and laid his cigar on the desk before him.

"Pipe Stage!" he said. "So you're here."

"Right you are, Gov," agreed Pipe, with mocking geniality. "I wondered if you'd know me."

"Well, what do you want?" The question came boldly, uncompromisingly. Something, perhaps the manner in which it was asked, was faintly not to the visitor's liking. His smile faded.



"I'll flatten him along with his tire when we go by," announced Pipe.

"Send that kid out and I'll tell you."

"Mr. Fitch is my secretary. He's fully in my confidence."

"This is a one-man job, Gov—"

Brady cut him short with uplifted hand. "He stays. What is it?"

The factitious joviality was quite submerged under a tide of sullenness. The man's heavy brows drew together. "I should worry." He threw a contemptuous glance at the alert young secretary, who gave him back a steady, hostile look. "If that's the way you want it—"

"It is."

"All right, then. The word'll come through pretty soon that a bank has been stuck up over in Derby."

THE Governor's manner did not change and he did not speak. He waited for the other to go on. When Stage saw that comment was not to be forthcoming, he growled: "I suppose you want to know where I come in?"

"I'm waiting to hear."

"Well, they may say I did it."

"Did you?"

"If I did, I'd be on my way, wouldn't I?" he asked, reasonably. "But I don't want to be picked up now and kept in stir for a couple of weeks. I got a big deal on and the pinch would spoil it. See!"

"Couldn't you prove your innocence?" countered the Governor skeptically.

"It aint so easy when you've been unlucky before," retorted the visitor. "Anyway, I don't want to be dragged over there to have something pinned on me I didn't do. That's fair, aint it?"

"Where do I come in?"

"It's this way. You—" He stared balefully at Corwin. "Send that guy out, will you?"

"No."

"If they pinch me, you'll turn 'em down on the extradition papers. For me, and a friend who's waitin' outside."

"I will? Why?"

"You know why." Stage nodded meaningly. "You'll turn 'em down, or—"

"Or what?" The Governor shifted his position slightly, so he faced the other man more squarely. If Stage typified force, certainly Brady, in the poise of his head, the direct glance of his eyes, and the disciplined quietude of his big body, was the personification of power. Leisurely he opened the top drawer of his desk, found a match and relighted his cigar.

STAGE smiled triumphantly. "Oh, I've kept track of you, Gov. I knew the time was comin' when I'd need something. I know you got it all fixed to go to the Senate next fall—well, this is the time!

"You aint takin' any chance. Nobody can reely prove I was in that Derby job. There wont be any—evidence lyin' around when they make the pinch. All you got to do is stand pat and refuse to give us up on suspicion.

"Suppose the thing was pulled off at six o'clock over there. You and your boy friend here can say we—Grunt and me—was in your office at six. Why, it's easy!"

"At six o'clock I was going to my house at the other end of the park," replied the Governor.

Jubilantly Pipe clapped his knee. "That's the dope! I drove up and asked you the way—see? Nuthin' wrong with that. It's my own car. And if I was here, I certainly couldn't be over at Derby."

"That would be a perfectly good alibi," agreed the Governor, thoughtfully.

"Sure!" Pipe was beaming now. "Then you'll do it, Gov?"

"Suppose I don't?" said Brady coolly.

The other, in ugly fashion, leaned forward in his chair. "Then I'll smear you!" he gritted. "I'll kill that Senate thing; I'll drive you out of this job. I'll tell 'em you're a jailbird. I'll squeal about that stretch you did back in Illinois for highway robbery!"

"Oh, you will!" The Governor did not raise his voice, but something alive and vibrant came into it. "Do you think I'd let you put anything over on me, Stage? Do you think I'm not ready for you? Do you think from the minute I went into politics I didn't discount anything you might do?

"Well, if you did, you're wrong. Long ago I prepared for this. I fixed it with myself and with my wife. We're all ready; so long as we are, nothing else counts.

"Another thing you've overlooked, Stage. I've been keeping track of you, too. I know about the years you've spent in Sing Sing and Marquette and Joliet. I've got your record.

"I'll admit if you got to the newspapers, it might beat me. It's the first story that counts. But I think we can pull your fangs. I'll tell everything myself—the straight of it. You'll sit here and listen to it. And you wont deny it, because what I say will be the truth."

Pipe, possessed by rage, spat forth his venom: "Is that so? Well, you'll have to hurry. I'm goin' to get it to 'em—fast. They'll kick you outa here in less than a week, you—"

He dropped his hands on the arms of the chair, preparatory to rising, but the Governor's voice, and the cold, black snout of the weapon which came swiftly from the open drawer of the Governor's desk, held him immobile.

"Don't move! Sit still, just exactly as you are. You're not in a hurry to get back to Derby, are you? Because that's where you're going, Stage. Son," he spoke without turning his head, "I wish you'd just frisk—I believe that's the proper word—this fellow. I suspect he's got a gun."

THE secretary came forward. A search revealed two under-arm holsters, one on each side, and their deadly freight.

"Only two?" queried the Governor, as

As the others sprang to their feet, Pipe flung the chair savagely—the door slammed behind him.

Corwin placed the arsenal in the drawer and pushed it shut. "I'm surprised. He was practically defenseless. Unless he had something else, son?"

"A dozen loaded clips, but they aren't much good to him now," reported Corwin.

"All right. Just run down to the press-room and have the newspaper boys come up. There's a little statement I want to make to them. You can sit down again, Stage. And remember to keep right on sitting."

Corwin, pale and troubled, stood hesitantly before him. "Governor?"

"Yes?"

"You don't have to do this—give the story to the newspapers, I mean? Why, it'll kill you politically! Oh, I know you're innocent; you don't have to tell me that. But if you've—you've been in jail, rags like the *Express* will harp on it. People wont understand—"

"I don't see as there is anything else I can do, son." The Governor spoke gently.

"Let him go—anything!" The secretary spoke passionately. "Maybe he didn't rob the bank—"

"I didn't!" protested Pipe, earnestly. "Honest to God, I didn't! But I happened to be drivin' through there about that time, and heard the shots, and everything. And when a guy's been in trouble once, they're always tryin' to hang somethin' on him. That's the reason I'm scared.

"Lemme go, and I'll keep still about you—honest! I'm the only one left that knows, Gov. Bill Emery died of the con, years ago, and a bull bumped off Tony out in Seattle. Why, I'd be a fool to squeal on you and make trouble for myself! All I want's a chance to go straight."

NEVER had Pipe Stage's histrionic ability been better employed. Sincerity shone from his sinister, pale-blue eyes; there was a tremor of honest feeling in his voice. Like all good actors, he believed what he said while he was saying it.

But his audience was singularly unresponsive. "You know he robbed that bank. You couldn't save yourself that way, could you, son?" asked the Governor simply. "Of course you couldn't. Well, I can't, either. Go and bring those fellows in!"

"So Bill and Tony are dead?" mused the Governor, when he had gone. "Not bad boys, Pipe; at least, I didn't think so in the old days. They just got away to a bad start."

Stage roused himself from sour dejection for a last plea. "Let me slip out, wont you?" he begged. "You can say I took you

by surprise. I'll never squawk on you; what I said was all a bluff. Why, we were boys together; you know me—" He half rose.

"Sit down, Pipe," advised the Governor, not unkindly. "I suppose you can't help being what you are—a liar and a crook. You were all set to blackmail me; you'd try it again in an hour, if you thought you could get away with it.

"No; there's nothing to do but go through with it. With you alive—" He paused and examined closely the pistol which he held in his hand. "If you should die, now," he resumed, as if talking to himself. "Say, trying to escape—"

Involuntarily Pipe gulped and the Governor looked at him shrewdly. The man's face was the color of wet paper; he wiped the sweat from his temples. "You—you don't mean—" he husked.

"No, I don't mean," reassured the Governor. "Just wanted to know if you were game, Pipe. I see you aren't unless there's a crowd around to watch you. You needn't worry. I wont shoot—unless I have to."

PRESENTLY Corwin returned; but he was not accompanied by the half-dozen staff correspondents who were assigned to the Capitol during the legislative session. One young man only came with him, a carefully dressed stranger.

"They've gone out to dinner, Governor," explained Corwin. "But Mr. Scott, of the New York *Enterprise*, just reached town. He's here to interview you."

The Governor smiled a trifle ruefully. "You should be peculiarly interested in what I'm going to say, Mr. Scott," he observed. "It will be, from your standpoint, hot stuff. Your people don't like me very well."

"Perhaps that's because they don't know you very well," returned Scott gravely, as they shook hands; "and you don't know them, either."

"Something to that, I suppose," agreed the Governor. "However, it can't be helped just now. Son, I wish you'd take down what I say, and make copies for the other boys."

They seated themselves, Scott and the secretary with his notebook, facing the Governor. Pipe maintained his place by the door, his bold eyes turning restlessly from one to the other. Scott searched his pockets for paper on which to make notes, and found none.

With a murmured, "If you please," he borrowed a sheet from the Governor's desk, folded it across and over and rested it on his knee. With a short pencil from his vest pocket he was prepared to take notes. His eyes widened at the sight of the automatic near the executive's hand.

Apparently he missed little. He studied Pipe with swift glances, and tried to reconcile his presence here with his defiant air and hardboiled look. The Governor read his thought. "He belongs in the story," was the brief explanation, and then Brady plunged into his narrative.

"WHEN I was a year old," he began abruptly, "my parents started with me for the West from our home in Connecticut. The train was wrecked near Holmesdale, a little town in Illinois, and they were both killed. I escaped without a scratch.

"It was a bad smash-up, with a lot of fatalities, and folks didn't pay much attention to me for some little time. Except, of course, to see I was fed and cared for. When things settled down, they tried to find out something about me. But they couldn't.

"They established the fact that my father's name was Oliver Brady. But either he and my mother were orphans, or their relatives were living in so obscure a place that they couldn't be located. Anyway, no one claimed me.

"Holmesdale hadn't any family who wanted to adopt me, and I was sent to the nearest orphanage, which was fifty miles away. I stayed there until I was twelve years old.

"I suppose all orphanages are more or less alike. They do the best they can. But I wasn't happy. I never had anything to wear but a blue checked cotton shirt, shoes too big for me, and breeches cut down, not very skillfully, from castoffs. The legs flapped around my shins, and the other boys at school, who had proper knee-breeches, made a good deal of fun of us. No, I can't say it was pleasant."

Scott nodded sympathetically. Corwin idled over his shorthand characters, for the Governor spoke slowly, with frequent pauses, as his thoughts turned into the past. Pipe listened absorbedly, his blunt lower jaw hanging a little agape.

"When I was twelve, a farmer named William Henry Cooney, living near Holmesdale, as it happened, took me out of the orphanage, on the supposition that I would

do a man's work around his place. As near as he could make me, and I was able, I did. When I fell short, he licked me. So I wasn't as content there as I had been at the orphanage—if you could call that contentment.

"He renamed me Henry Cooney, and sent me to school part of the time. I slept in the attic. It was infernally cold in winter; the snow sifted in through cracks around the windows. And it was hot in summer, for there was nothing overhead but the rafters and the shingles.

"I had only two escapes from the drudgery at Cooney's. One was books. I loved to read. I read everything I could get my hands on, whether it was law, philosophy, dime novels, fairy stories, or histories. There was no public library in the town, and I had to pick up books, most of them tattered and almost worn out, whenever and wherever I could. I educated myself by that reading, although I didn't realize it then.

"The other escape was the companionship of three boys my own age, or a little older. They weren't the best in the world to associate with, but I couldn't pick and choose.

"Cooney's farm was on the edge of Holmesdale, and there were quite a good many children in the town. Most of them wouldn't associate with me. I had wretched clothes; I was hungry-looking. And I suppose I carried a sort of put-upon, hangdog air.

"Besides all that, while I might be respectable, I wasn't desirable. I was a bound boy whose antecedents weren't known—I just didn't belong."

"THAT was pretty tough, Governor," observed Scott, who had been scrawling an occasional note on his folded paper.

Governor Brady raised his hand. "Oh, I'm not making any bid for sympathy," he disclaimed. "Lots of boys in their own homes had tougher times than I had. But I want you to understand—to get the background.

"So I did my chumming with the only three boys who would have anything to do with me, really—Billy Emery, Tony Scarone, and Paul Stage. We used to call Paul 'Pipe' because he was tall and thin, with a big head, like a clay pipe.

"Billy and Tony are dead, but Pipe Stage is very much alive. I'll tell you some more about him presently.

"Well, in the evenings and Sundays when I wasn't busy with the chores, we went around together. We built a shack under a railroad bridge not far from Cooney's farm. That was our hangout.

"Maybe it was a good thing for me that Cooney kept me so busy. I wasn't with the other fellows much during the daytime. It developed afterward that they were petty thieves. They were always coming to the shanty with plunder which must have seemed odd, had I been at all suspicious. But I wasn't.

"I didn't think much about it. And anyway, Pipe Stage kept me from puzzling about them. I think he is the most accomplished liar I have ever known. And that's quite a tribute, considering I've been in politics most of my lifetime."

SCOTT laughed. Pipe had whittled a match to a point and was busily engaged in picking his teeth. A faint smile crossed his face.

"He claimed to work as a drover for a cattle-buyer. That accounted for the fruit, the wearing apparel and the pocket-knives and mouth-organs that appeared in profusion. I know now they were stolen. But Pipe was plausible—and dramatic. It was a downright pleasure to hear him tell his fanciful adventures, how he outbargained old Creager, who ran the general store, and how Tom Jones praised and rewarded him when he kept the cattle from trampling Tom's grain.

"For a long time afterward, I couldn't understand why they didn't invite me into the thieving partnership. I suppose it was because I had decent ancestors. There was a downright hatred of dishonesty implanted in me with my first breath. I didn't steal only because I couldn't. There were lots of things I wanted, yearned for. But it was a physical impossibility to close my fingers on them.

"It wasn't a virtue; it was an inhibition.

"Pipe, who was the leader, realized that. I suppose he didn't want to offend me. And besides, it appealed to his sense of plot and intrigue to keep me in ignorance of what they were up to. Anyway, they did.

"The close friendship began when I was sixteen, and lasted only for a few weeks. I suppose if it had gone on for any length of time I must have found them out.

"I was in the shanty one night, reading by the light of a candle-end, when Pipe came in. It was in the fall, I remember,

a clear and frosty night, and I had started a fire in the broken stove.

"Pipe seemed excited. He said his father was drunk again, and he was afraid the old man would take away the money he earned that week with the cattle-drover. He asked me to keep it for him until the elder Stage, who worked in the slaughter-house, sobered up.

"Of course I agreed. The same thing had happened before. So he handed over a two-dollar bill and forty cents in silver. We sat there wondering for a half hour or so where Bill and Tony were. Then the door of the shack was jerked open and a deputy sheriff took us off to jail.

"It seems that a peddler had been robbed by three boys on the road about a mile out of town. He resisted when they pounced on him, and that brought on a heart attack. He died soon after without recovering consciousness.

"There's no use in elaborating on what followed. The peddler had had two dollars and forty cents. It was found on me. Pipe, with the help of his father, proved an alibi. He swore that I came to the shanty and boasted of committing the robbery with Billy and Tony.

"They postponed the trial, in the hope of rounding up the other two, but they made a clean get-away. So the jury found me guilty. The town was aroused. It was the first crime of violence in years. The presiding judge felt the pressure and he sentenced me to serve ten years in the penitentiary."

"THE penitentiary?" ejaculated Scott. "How could he? You say you were only sixteen."

"Quite true," the Governor nodded. "But I was big for my age. There was no record of the time of my birth. And I hadn't any friends. Cooney publicly washed his hands of me."

"What did they do with Pipe?" asked the newspaper man.

"Do—nothing! Why, Pipe was a hero! I never saw better acting than he did on the witness stand. He told the details of the robbery as he said I told them to him—told them in my words, with my gestures. The jury smiled openly when I swore he gave me the money to keep for him.

"I was in the shanty alone while the robbery was being committed. I had no alibi; no one saw me. So they put me away."

"But surely you didn't serve—" began Scott and stopped.

"I served only a few weeks," the Governor explained. "The other two boys were picked up in Florida and confessed. Pipe had been the ringleader, of course. I was formally exonerated. He was sent up instead, and his father drew a term for perjury."

"Governor, I don't see how even a hostile newspaper could make much capital of that," mused the reporter. "You have the records?"

"Yes, I got copies of everything. When they freed me, I didn't care much for Holmesdale, naturally. So I came out into this country, dropped the name of Cooney, and took my own again. The story didn't follow me; I found good friends; worked days, studied nights—put myself through college and went into politics. You know the rest.

"Of course, with the Senatorial campaign coming on, I didn't want the thing to come out. That's natural. I told no one but my wife. I hoped it would be lost sight of forever.

"But when I entered public life, I made a vow with myself that if the past ever rose up in my path, I'd call its bluff. I wouldn't dodge and truckle and buy silence. I'd put the cards on the table and let the people settle it.

"You'd be surprised how that decision has smoothed things. I've never been scared, though I knew, sometime or other, I'd have to make good on it. In lots of ways it's helped me. When the revelation came, I'd need clean hands; so I tried to keep them clean."

"Pardon me, Governor, but why do you make the disclosure now?" As he spoke, Scott's eyes wandered involuntarily to the silent figure by the door.

"Pipe Stage robbed the bank at Derby this evening," replied Brady. "He beat the pursuit across the State line and tried to blackmail me into refusing extradition. That's Pipe sitting over there, and this is my answer." He rose. "The newspapers will publish my story tomorrow. But we'll turn Pipe over to the Capitol police now."

"The hell you will!" Pipe was up, the bulging bag in his hand. As the others, startled, sprang to their feet, he flung the heavy chair savagely in the path of the advancing Governor.

Brady, caught across the knees, stumbled and fell. The door slammed violently be-

hind Pipe. An instant later the door of the middle office banged. The spring lock caught, inflicting upon his pursuers momentary delay.

Pipe closed the outside entrance too, fled down the steps, and threw himself into the car.

"Step on 'er," he ordered, hoarsely. "It didn't work."

When the three pursuers, bareheaded, reached the curb, the car was already a block away, tearing through the rain like a thing possessed, and gaining speed with every rod.

"Gone!" ejaculated the Governor, disgustedly. "I should have locked him up first and done my talking afterward. They will never catch him now!"

Barely were the words spoken when a ripping, tearing crash sounded through the night. On the heels of their startled ejaculations came a second.

"I think you're wrong, Governor," replied Scott. "Something's stopped that car." He sprinted off through the rain.

A policeman, blowing frantically at his whistle, was already there when they arrived. The scene before them told its own story. On the left a huge express car, its front vestibule smashed in, stood askew on the switch leading from the rear of the interurban station.

On the right, diagonally across, a telephone-pole had been sheared off by the rebound of the automobile. A few feet farther ahead, under the impersonal white radiance of a street arc, lay a mass of broken, twisted wood and steel. Grotesquely, one rear wheel, pointing skyward, still revolved. The crew of the interurban, shaken but uninjured, stood near by.

Grunt lay half out of the wreckage of the car. The policeman, still sounding the alarm, was bending over him as they came up. "He's breathin', though I don't know why," observed the officer. "Here, help me lift the engine off him, will you?"

"There was another man—" began Scott.

"He's all through." He jerked his thumb toward the smashed pole. They looked; shuddered, and turned away. Pipe Stage had made an exit as dramatic as his exotic imagination could have conjured.

A SERGEANT of police came puffing up. "What's all this?" he demanded. And then, recognizing the Governor, raised two fingers to his visor in salute. "You're not hurt, sir?"

"We weren't in the car," interposed Corwin. "Word just came from Derby that a bank has been robbed. I think these"—he indicated the motionless figures—"are the bandits. Better look for the money."

"Yeah; here's a bag and a suitcase," the sergeant reported, peering into the wreck. "And here's some o' the coin." He indicated certain glittering disks on the pavement which heretofore had escaped their notice. "Stand back, youse!" he commanded the crowd which was gathering rapidly. "Any orders, sir?" He turned again to the Governor.

"No; take charge, Sergeant. Let me know if there's anything I can do. We're going back to the office." He walked up the rain-swept street, the two young men flanking him.

ONCE back in the inner room of the gubernatorial suite, Corwin did a curious thing. Eyes shining, he tore a handful of pages from his stenographic notebook, carried them to the fireplace and touched a match to them. Then he turned to Scott. Grinning broadly, they shook hands while the Governor, mystified, looked on.

"What's coming off here, son?" he demanded, as the flames licked up the sheets of paper. "Those are the notes you just made, aren't they?"

"Yes sir."

"But the other newspaper boys—the story will have to go out. Scott, here, has it—"

"I wasn't taking notes," explained the gleeful Scott. "I was writing a pass."

"A pass?" echoed the bewildered Governor.

"Yes. You see, sir, I'm not a reporter. I happen to be Scott Anthony, an actor, playing the lead in 'Queens and Quarterbacks.' Corry and I were in college together. I was waiting to see him when he came out and persuaded me to put on an extra matinee, starring as a demon reporter for the New York *Enterprise*."

"Then—then—" began Governor Brady, and stopped.

"I've forgotten every word I heard," the youth assured him earnestly. "It's gone forever. You see, I've made up my mind that some day I'll have a chance to vote for you for President. Naturally, nothing I do or say shall jeopardize that opportunity. . . . . Shall we go out and have a bite to eat? I'm due at the theater in less than an hour."

TARZAN and the Lost Empire

NKIMA the little messenger-monkey danced excitedly upon the naked brown shoulder of Tarzan.

The monkey's quick ear had caught the approach of strangers through the forest; and a moment later a bearded white man, the medical missionary Von Harben, appeared—come, it seemed, to ask assistance of Tarzan. For Von Harben's son Erich, a scholar and anthropologist, had led an expedition to discover the rumored lost tribes of the unexplored Wiramwazi Mountains. And Erich had never returned.

Tarzan agreed to go to Erich's rescue, and set out forthwith. After many days' travel he reached that little-known region —even descended the terrific precipice that had stopped all previous travelers. But there disaster overtook him; for a chance fall stunned him, and he was made prisoner by the Bagego, a negro tribe held in servitude by strange masters—by none other than a surviving remnant of a Roman legion that had pushed into Africa many centuries before.

Meanwhile Erich von Harben had met a similar fate: he too had been made captive by this curious offshoot of Roman civilization; but his captors were of another and rival city, Castrum Mare, and he knew nothing of Tarzan's coming. His situation, moreover, was far easier than Tarzan's. For the Emperor Validus merely put him to work upon the records in the state library; and despite the treachery of Fupus, a young patrician, Erich won favor in the eyes of the lovely Favonia.

But Tarzan, captive of the cruel Emperor Sublatus in the rival Roman city Castra Sanguinarius, was in straits desperate indeed. Brought before the Emperor, he demanded his freedom and was

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In increasing volume the savage roar rolled into the garden of Cæsar. The Waziri had come!

By

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

The climax of this captivating romance is of tremendous power—something no one who reads it will soon forget.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

ordered to a dungeon for his insolence. Whereupon, brushing aside his guards, Tarzan strode to the imperial throne, seized Sublatus, swung him helpless above his head—and, threatening to kill the Emperor if any interfered, marched safe out of the palace. Then, abandoning his royal shield, the ape-man leaped to an overhanging branch and swung himself out of sight.

Later Tarzan rescued Dilecta, daughter of wealthy Dion Splendidus, from the libertine Fastus, son of Sublatus; and in gratitude Dilecta's lover, the young officer Maximus Præclarus, arranged asylum for Tarzan at the home of his mother.

Not for long was Tarzan left unmolested, however. Dion Splendidus' garrulous slave Mpingu was threatened with torture by Cæsar's men till he betrayed Tarzan's whereabouts—then was forced to lure Tarzan to recapture. And thus again Tarzan found himself manacled in the dungeons of the Emperor Sublatus. More, he was led captive in chains at the Emperor's chariot-wheel for the public to see, and was then made to fight for his life in the arena—first against a professional murderer, then against a savage lion, then against a band of giant apes. But he killed the gladiator and the lion; and the apes recognized him as an old friend. Thereupon he led a revolt of the prisoners against Sublatus, and now we find him and his few friends and backers, including Præclarus—now a fellow-prisoner—battling desperately against the soldiers of the Emperor. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AND now a dull thud shook the outer wall and a piece of plaster crumbled to the floor upon the inside—the ballista had come into action. Once again the

heavy battering-ram shivered the groaning timbers of the door and the inmates of the room could hear the legionaries chanting the hymn of the ram to the cadence of which they swung it back and heaved it forward.

The troops in the garden went about their duty with quiet, military efficiency. Each time a stone from the ballista struck the wall there was a shout, but there was nothing spontaneous in the demonstration, which seemed as perfunctory as the mechanical operation of the ancient war engine that delivered its missiles with almost clocklike regularity.

The greatest damage that the ballista appeared to be doing was to the plaster on the inside of the wall, but the battering-ram was slowly but surely shattering the door upon the opposite side of the room.

"Look," said Metellus, "they are altering the line of the ballista! They have discovered that they can effect nothing against the wall."

"They are aiming at the window," said Præclarus.

"Those of you who are in line with the window lie down upon the floor," commanded Tarzan. "Quickly! The hammer is falling upon the trigger!"

THE next missile struck one side of the window, carrying away a piece of the stone, and this time the result was followed by an enthusiastic shout from the legionaries in the garden.

"That's what they should have done in the beginning," commented Hasta. "If they get the walls started at the edge of the window, they can make a breach more quickly there than elsewhere."

"That is evidently what they are planning on doing," said Metellus, as a second missile struck in the same place and a large fragment of the wall crumbled.

"Look to the door," shouted Tarzan, as the weakened timbers sagged to the impact of the ram.

A dozen swordsmen stood ready and waiting to receive the legionaries, whose rush they expected the instant that the door fell.

At one side of the room the six great apes crouched, growling, and kept in leash only by the repeated assurances of Tarzan that the man-things in the room with them were the friends of the ape-man.

As the door crashed there was a momentary silence as each side waited to see what the other would do, and in the lull that ensued there came through the air a roaring sound ominous and threatening and then the shouts of the legionaries in the throne-room and the legionaries in the garden drowned all other sounds.

The gap around the window had been enlarged. The missiles of the ballista had crumbled the wall from the ceiling to the floor, and as though in accordance with a prearranged plan the legionaries assaulted simultaneously, one group rushing the doorway from the throne-room, the other the breach in the opposite wall.

QUICKLY Tarzan turned toward the apes, and pointing in the direction of the breached wall, shouted:

"Stop them, Zutho! Kill, Goy-ad, kill!"

The men near him looked at him in surprise, and perhaps they shuddered a little as they heard the growling voice of a beast issue from the throat of the giant barbarian, but instantly they realized he was speaking to their hairy fellows as they saw the apes spring forward with bared fangs, and growling hideously, throw themselves savagely upon the first legionaries to reach the window.

Two apes went down instantly, pierced by Roman pikes, but before the mad rage of the others Cæsar's soldiers gave back.

"After them," cried Tarzan to Præclarus. "Follow them into the garden. Capture the ballista and turn it upon the legionaries. We will hold the throne-room door until you have seized the ballista, then we shall fall back upon you."

After the battling apes rushed the three patricians, Maximus Præclarus, Cassius Hasta and Cæcilius Metellus, leading gladiators, thieves, murderers and slaves into the garden, profiting by the temporary advantage the apes had gained for them.

SIDE by side with the remaining gladiators Tarzan fought to hold the legionaries back from the little doorway until the balance of his party had won safely to the garden and seized the ballista. Glancing back he saw Mpingu leading Dilecta from the room in the rear of the escaped prisoners. Then he turned again to the defense of the doorway, which his little party held stubbornly until Tarzan saw the ballista in the hands of his own men, and, giving step by step across the room, he and they backed through the ragged breach in the wall.

Tarzan turned and shouted: "Stop them, Zutho! Kill, Goy-ad, kill!" Growling hideously, the apes sprang forward with bared fangs.

At a shout of command from Præclarus, they leaped to one side. The hammer fell upon the trigger of the ballista, which Præclarus had lined upon the window, and a heavy rock drove full into the faces of the legionaries.

FOR a moment the fates had been kind to Tarzan and his fellows, but it soon became apparent that they were little if any better off here than in the room which they had just quitted, for in the garden they were ringed by legionaries. Pikes were flying through the air and though the ballista and their own good swords were keeping the enemy at a respectful distance, there was none among them who believed that they could for long withstand the superior numbers and the better equipment of their adversaries.

There came a pause in the fighting, which must necessarily be the case in hand-to-hand encounters, and as though by tacit agreement each side rested.

The three whites watched the enemy closely

"They are preparing for a concerted attack with pikes," said Præclarus.

"That will write finis to our earthly endeavors," remarked Cassius Hasta.

"May the gods receive us with rejoicing," said Cæcilius Metellus.

"I think the gods prefer them to us," said Tarzan.

"Why?" demanded Cassius Hasta.

"Because they have taken so many more of them to heaven this night," replied the ape-man, pointing at the corpses lying about the garden; and Cassius Hasta smiled appreciatively.

"They will charge in another moment," said Maximus Præclarus, and turning to Dilecta he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Good-by, dear heart," he said. "How fleeting is happiness! How futile the hopes of mortal man!"

"Not good-by, Præclarus," replied the girl, "for where you go I shall go!" And she showed him the slim dagger in her hand.

"No," cried the man. "Promise me that you will not do that."

"And why not? Is not death sweeter than to be the bride of Fastus?"

"Perhaps you are right," he said, sadly.

"They come," cried Cassius Hasta.

"Ready," shouted Tarzan. "Give them all we have! Death is better than the dungeons of the colosseum."

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM the far end of the garden, above the din of breaking battle, rose a savage cry—a new note that attracted the startled attention of the contestants upon both sides.

Tarzan's head snapped to attention. His nostrils sniffed the air. Recognition, hope, surprise, incredulity surged through his consciousness as he stood there with flashing eyes looking out over the heads of his adversaries.

In increasing volume the savage roar rolled into the garden of Cæsar.

The legionaries turned to face the vanguard of an army, led by a horde of ebon warriors—glistening giants from whose proud heads floated white feather war-bonnets and from whose throats issued the savage war-cry which had filled the heart of Tarzan with joy.

The Waziri had come!

At their head Tarzan saw Muviro, and with him was Lukedi, but what the ape-man did not see, and what none of those in the garden of Cæsar saw until later, was the horde of warriors from the outer villages of Castra Sanguinarius that, following the Waziri into the city, were already overrunning the palace, furiously seeking the vengeance that had so long been denied them.

AS the last of the legionaries in the garden threw down their arms and begged Tarzan's protection, Muviro ran to the ape-man and, kneeling at his feet, kissed his hand, and at the same instant a little monkey dropped from an overhanging tree onto Tarzan's shoulder.

"The gods of our ancestors have been good to the Waziri," said Muviro; "otherwise we should have been too late."

"I was puzzled as to how you found me," said Tarzan, "until I saw Nkima."

"Yes, it was Nkima," said Muviro. "He came back to the country of the Waziri, to the land of Tarzan, and led us here. Many times we would have turned back, thinking that he was mad, but he urged us on and we followed him. Now the big Bwana can come back with us to the home of his own people."

"No," said Tarzan, shaking his head, "I cannot come yet. The son of my good friend is still in this valley; but you are just in time to help me rescue him—nor is there any time to lose."

Legionaries, throwing down their arms, were running from the palace from which came the shrieks and groans of the dying and the savage hoots and cries of the avenging horde. Præclarus stepped to Tarzan's side.

"The barbarians of the outer villages are attacking the city, murdering all who fall into their hands," he cried. "We must gather what men we can and make a stand against them. Will these blacks, who have just come, fight with us against them?"

"They will fight as I direct," replied Tarzan, "but I think it will not be necessary to make war upon the barbarians. Lukedi, where are the white officers who command the barbarians?"

"Once they neared the palace," replied Lukedi, "the warriors became so excited that they broke away from their white leaders and followed after their own chieftain."

"Go and fetch their greatest chief," directed Tarzan.

DURING the half-hour that followed, Tarzan and his lieutenants were busy reorganizing their forces into which were incorporated the legionaries who had surrendered to them, in caring for the wounded and planning for the future.

From the palace came the hoarse cries of the hooting blacks and Tarzan had about abandoned hope that Lukedi would be able to persuade a chief to him when Lukedi returned, accompanied by two warriors from the outer villages, whose bearing and ornaments proclaimed them chieftains.

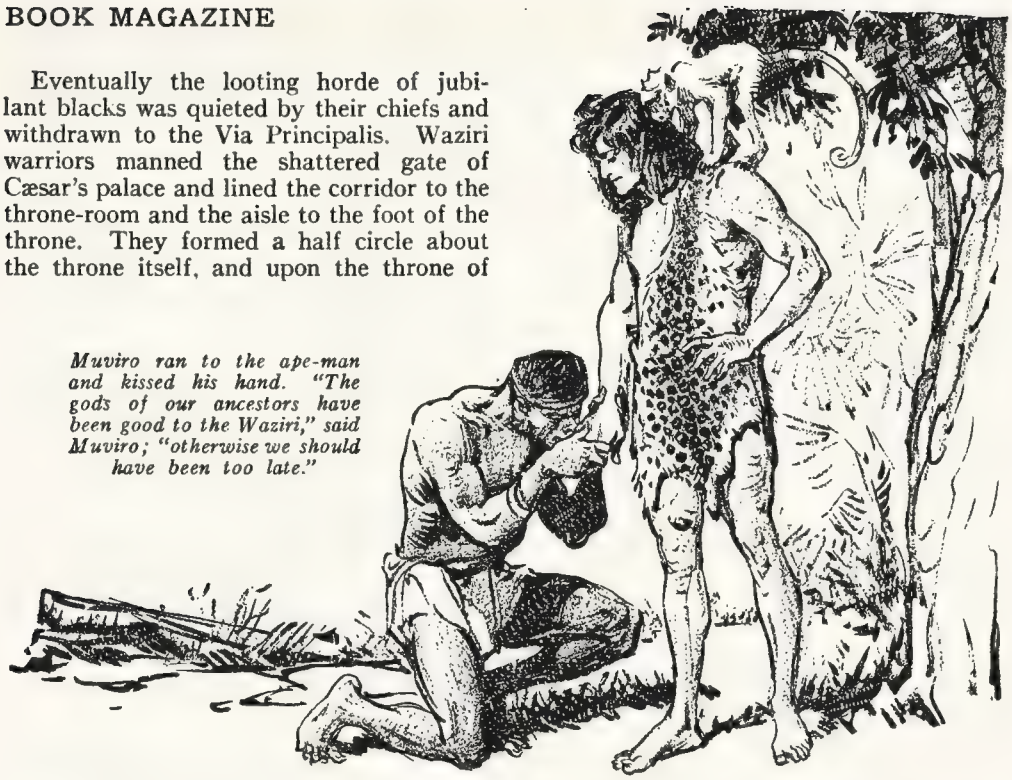
"You are the man called Tarzan?" demanded one of the chiefs.

The ape-man nodded. "I am," he said.

"We have been looking for you. This Bagego said that you have promised that no more shall our people be taken into slavery and no longer shall our warriors be condemned to the arena. How can you, who are yourself a barbarian, guarantee this to us?"

"If I cannot guarantee it you have the power to enforce it yourself," replied the ape-man, "and I with my Waziri will aid you; but now you must gather your warriors. Let no one be killed from now on who does not oppose you. Gather your warriors and take them into the avenue before the palace and then come with your sub-chiefs to the throne-room of Cæsar. There we shall demand and receive justice, not for the moment but for all time. Go!"

Eventually the looting horde of jubilant blacks was quieted by their chiefs and withdrawn to the Via Principalis. Waziri warriors manned the shattered gate of Cæsar's palace and lined the corridor to the throne-room and the aisle to the foot of the throne. They formed a half circle about the throne itself, and upon the throne of



Muviro ran to the ape-man and kissed his hand. "The gods of our ancestors have been good to the Waziri," said Muviro; "otherwise we should have been too late."

Cæsar sat Tarzan of the Apes, with Præclarus and Dilecta and Cassius Hasta and Cæcilius Metellus and Muviro about him, while little Nkima sat upon his shoulder and complained bitterly, for Nkima, as usual, was frightened and cold and hungry.

"Send legionaries to fetch Sublatus and Fastus," Tarzan directed Præclarus, "for this business must be attended to quickly, as within the hour I march on Castrum Mare."

Flushed with excitement, the legionaries who had been sent to fetch Sublatus and Fastus rushed into the throne-room. "Sublatus is dead!" they cried. "Fastus is dead! The barbarians have slain them. The chambers and corridors above are filled with the corpses of senators, nobles and officers of the legion!"

"Are none left alive?" demanded Præclarus, paling.

"Yes," replied one of the legionaries, "there were some barricaded in another apartment who withstood the onslaught of the blacks. We explained to them that they are now safe and they are coming to the throne-room." And up the aisle marched the remaining few of the wedding-guests, the sweat and blood upon the men evidencing the dire straits from which they had been delivered, the women still nervous and hysterical. Leading them came Dion Splendidus and at sight of him Dilecta gave a cry of relief and pleasure and ran down the steps of the throne and along the aisle to meet him.

Tarzan's face lighted with relief when he saw the old senator, for his weeks in the home of Festivitas and his long incarceration with Maximus Præclarus in the dungeons of the colosseum had familiarized him with the politics of Castra Sanguinarius, and now the presence of Dion Splendidus was all that he needed to complete the plans that the tyranny and cruelty of Sublatus had forced upon him.

He rose from the throne and raised his hand for silence; the hum of voices ceased.

"Cæsar is dead, but upon some one of you must fall the mantle of Cæsar," declared Tarzan.

"Long live Tarzan! Long live the new Cæsar!" cried one of the gladiators, and instantly every Sanguinarian in the room took up the cry.

The ape-man smiled and shook his head. "No," he said, "not I—but there is one here to whom I offer the imperial diadem upon the condition that he fulfill the promises I have made to the barbarians of the outer villages.

"Dion Splendidus, will you accept the

imperial purple with the understanding that the men of the outer villages shall be forever free; that no longer shall their girls or their boys be pressed into slavery, or their warriors forced to do battle in the arena?"

Dion Splendidus bowed his head in assent—and thus did Tarzan refuse the diadem and create a Cæsar.

CHAPTER XXV

THE yearly triumph of Validus Augustus, Emperor of the East, had been a poor thing by comparison with that of Sublatus of Castra Sanguinarius, though dignity and interest was lent the occasion by the presence of the much-advertised young barbarian chieftain, who strode in chains behind Cæsar's chariot.

The vain show of imperial power pleased Validus Augustus, deceived perhaps the more ignorant of his subjects, and would have given Erich von Harben cause for laughter had he not realized the seriousness of his position.

No captive chained to the chariot of the greatest Cæsar that ever lived had faced a more hopeless situation than he. What though he knew that a regiment of marines or a squadron of Uhlans might have reduced this entire empire to vassalage? What though he knew that the mayor of many a modern city could have commanded a fighting force far greater and much more effective than this little Cæsar? The knowledge was only tantalizing, for the fact remained that Validus Augustus was supreme here and there was neither regiment of marines nor squadron of Uhlans to question his behavior toward the subject of a great republic that could have swallowed his entire empire without being conscious of any discomfort.

Now the triumph was over. Von Harben had been returned to the cell which he occupied with Mallius Lepos.

"You are back early," said Lepos. "How did the triumph of Validus impress you?"

"It was not much of a show, if I may judge by the amount of enthusiasm displayed by the people."

"The triumphs of Validus are always poor things," said Lepos. "He would rather put ten talents in his belly or on his back than spend one denarius to amuse the people."

"And the games," asked Von Harben, "will they be as poor?"

"They do not amount to much," said Lepos. "We have few criminals here and as we have to purchase all our slaves they are too valuable to waste in this way. Many of the contests are between wild beasts; an occasional thief or murderer may be pitted against a gladiator, but for the most part Validus depends upon professional gladiators, and political prisoners—enemies or supposed enemies of Cæsar. More often they are like you and I—victims of the lying and jealous intrigues of favorites. There are about twenty such in the dungeons now and they will furnish the most interesting entertainment of the games."

"And if we are victorious, we are freed?" asked Von Harben.

"We shall not be victorious," said Mallius Lepos. "Fulvus Fupus has seen to that, you may rest assured."

"It is a terrible predicament!" muttered Von Harben.

"You are afraid to die?" asked Mallius Lepos.

"It is not that," said Von Harben. "I am thinking of Favonia."

"And well you may," said Mallius Lepos. "My sweet cousin would be far happier dead, than married to Fulvus Fupus."

"I feel so helpless," said Von Harben, "not a friend, not even my faithful body-servant, Gabula."

"Oh, that reminds me," exclaimed Lepos. "They were here looking for him this morning."

"Looking for him? Is he not confined in the dungeon?"

"He was, but he was detailed with other prisoners to prepare the arena last night and during the darkness of early morning he is supposed to have escaped. Be that as it may, they were looking for him."

"Good!" exclaimed Von Harben. "I shall feel better just knowing that he is at large, though there is nothing that he can do for me. Where could he have gone?"

"Castrum Mare is ill-guarded along its waterfront, but the lake itself and the crocodiles form a barrier as efficacious as many legionaries. Gabula may have scaled the wall, but the chances are that he is hiding within the city, protected by other slaves or, possibly, by Septimus Favonius himself."

"I wish I might feel that the poor, faithful fellow had been able to escape the country and return to his own people," said Von Harben.

Mallius Lepos shook his head. "That is impossible," he said. "Though you came down over the cliff, he could not return that way and even if he could find the pass to the outer world he would fall into the hands of the soldiers of Castra Sanguinarius or the black barbarians of their outer villages. No, there is no chance that Gabula will escape."

ALL too quickly the time passed between the hour that Erich von Harben was returned to his cell, following his exhibition in the triumph of Validus Augustus, and the coming of the colosseum guards to drive them into the arena.

The colosseum was packed. The *loges* of the patricians were filled. The haughty Cæsar of the East sat upon an ornate throne, shaded by a canopy of purple linen. Septimus Favonius sat with bowed head in his *loge* and with him was his wife and Favonia. The girl sat with staring eyes fixed upon the gateway from which the contestants were emerging. She saw her cousin, Mallius Lepos, emerge and with him Erich von Harben, and she shuddered and closed her eyes for a moment.

When she opened them again the column was forming and the contestants were marched across the white sands to receive the commands of Cæsar. With Mallius Lepos and Von Harben marched the twenty political prisoners, all of whom were of the patrician class. Then came the professional gladiators, coarse, brutal men, whose business it was to kill or be killed. Leading these, with a bold swagger, was one who had been champion gladiator of Castrum Mare for five years. If the people had an idol, it was he. They roared their approval of him. "Claudius Taurus! Claudius Taurus!" rose above a babel of voices. A few mean thieves, some frightened slaves and a half-dozen lions completed the scanty list of victims that were to make a Roman holiday.

Erich von Harben had often been intrigued by the stories of the games of ancient Rome. Often had he pictured the colosseum packed with its thousands and the contestants upon the white sand of the arena, but now he realized that they had been but pictures—merely the photographs of his imagination. The people in those dreams had been but picture people—automatons, who move only when we look at them. When there had been action on the sand the audience had been a silent etching, and when the audience had roared and turned its thumbs down the actors had been mute and motionless.

How different, this! He saw the constant motion in the packed stands, the mosaic of a thousand daubs of color that became kaleidoscopic with every move of the multitude. He heard the hum of voices and sensed the offensive odor of many human bodies. He saw the hawkers and vendors passing along the aisles shouting their wares. He saw the legionaries stationed everywhere. He saw the rich in their canopied *loges* and the poor in the hot sun of the cheap seats.

Sweat was trickling down the back of the neck of the patrician marching just in front. Von Harben, glancing at Claudius Taurus, saw that his tunic was faded and that his hairy legs were dirty. He had always thought of gladiators as clean-limbed and resplendent. Claudius Taurus shocked him.

IN solid rank they formed before the *loge* of Cæsar. Von Harben could smell the black men who were pressing close behind him. The air was hot and oppressive. The whole thing was disgusting. There was no grandeur to it, no dignity. He wondered if it had been like this in Rome.

And then he looked up into the *loge* of Cæsar. He saw the man in gorgeous robes, sitting upon his carved throne. He saw naked blacks swaying long-handled fans of feathers above the head of Cæsar. He saw large men in gorgeous tunics and cuirasses of shining gold. He saw the wealth and pomp and circumstance of power, and something told him that after all ancient Rome had probably been much as this was—that its populace had smelled and that its gladiators had had hairy legs with dirt on them and that its patricians had sweated behind the ears.

Perhaps Validus Augustus was as great a Cæsar as any of them, for did he not rule half of his known world? Few of them had done more than this.

His eyes wandered along the row of *loges*. The præfect of the games was speaking and Von Harben heard his voice, but the words did not reach his brain, for his eyes had suddenly met those of Favonia.

He saw the anguish and hopeless horror in her face and he tried to smile as he looked at her, a smile of encouragement and hope, but she saw only the beginning of the smile—for the tears came and the image of the man she loved was only a dull blur like the pain in her heart.

A movement in the stands behind the *loges* attracted Von Harben's eyes and he puckered his brows, straining his faculties to assure himself that he must be mistaken.

But he was not mistaken.

What he had seen was Gabula—he was moving toward the imperial *loge*, where he disappeared behind the hangings that formed the regal background of Cæsar's throne.

Then the præfect ordered them from the arena and as Von Harben moved across the sand he tried to find some explanation of Gabula's presence there—what errand had brought him to so dangerous a place?

THE contestants had traversed but half the width of the arena returning to their cells when a sudden scream, ringing out behind them, caused them all to turn. Von Harben saw that the disturbance came from the imperial *loge*, but the scene that met his startled gaze seemed too preposterous to have greater substance than a dream. Perhaps it was all a dream. Perhaps there was no Castrum Mare. Perhaps there was no Validus Augustus. Perhaps there was no— Ah, but that could not be true, there *was* a Favonia and this preposterous thing then that he was looking at was true, too.

A black man was holding Cæsar by the throat in a savage grip, about to drive a dagger into his heart—and the black man was Gabula!

It all happened so quickly and was over so quickly that scarcely had Cæsar's shriek rung through the colosseum than he lay dead at the foot of his carved throne, and Gabula the assassin in a single leap had cleared the arena wall and was running across the sand toward Von Harben.

"I have avenged you, Bwana!" cried the black man. "No matter what they do to you, you are avenged."

A GREAT groan arose from the audience and then a cheer as some one shouted: "Cæsar is dead!"

A hope flashed to the breast of Von Harben. He turned and grabbed Mallius Lepos by the arm.

"Cæsar is dead," he whispered. "Now is our chance!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Mallius Lepos.

"In the confusion we can escape. We can hide in the city, and at night we can take Favonia with us and go away."

"Where?" asked Mallius Lepos.

"God, I do not know!" exclaimed Von Harben; "but anywhere would be better than here, for Fulvus Fupus is Cæsar, and if we do not save Favonia tonight, it will be too late."

"You are undoubtedly right," said Mallius Lepos.

"Pass the word to the others," said Von Harben. "The more there are who try to escape, the better chance there will be for some of us to succeed."

The legionaries and their officers as well as the vast multitude could attend only upon what was transpiring in the *loge* of Cæsar. And so few of them had seen what really occurred there that as yet there had been no pursuit of Gabula.

Mallius Lepos turned to the other prisoners. "The gods have been good to us," he cried. "Cæsar is dead, and in the confusion we can escape. Come!"

As Mallius Lepos started on a run toward the gateway that led to the cells beneath the colosseum, the shouting prisoners fell in behind him. Only those of the professional gladiators who were also free men held aloof, but even they made no effort to stop the fleeing ones.

"Good luck!" shouted Claudius Taurus, as Von Harben passed him. "Now if some one would kill Fulvus Fupus we might have a Cæsar who is a Cæsar!"

SO confused and upset were the few guards beneath the colosseum by the sudden rush of the escaping prisoners, that they were easily overpowered, and a moment later the prisoners found themselves in the streets of Castrum Mare.

"Where now?" cried one.

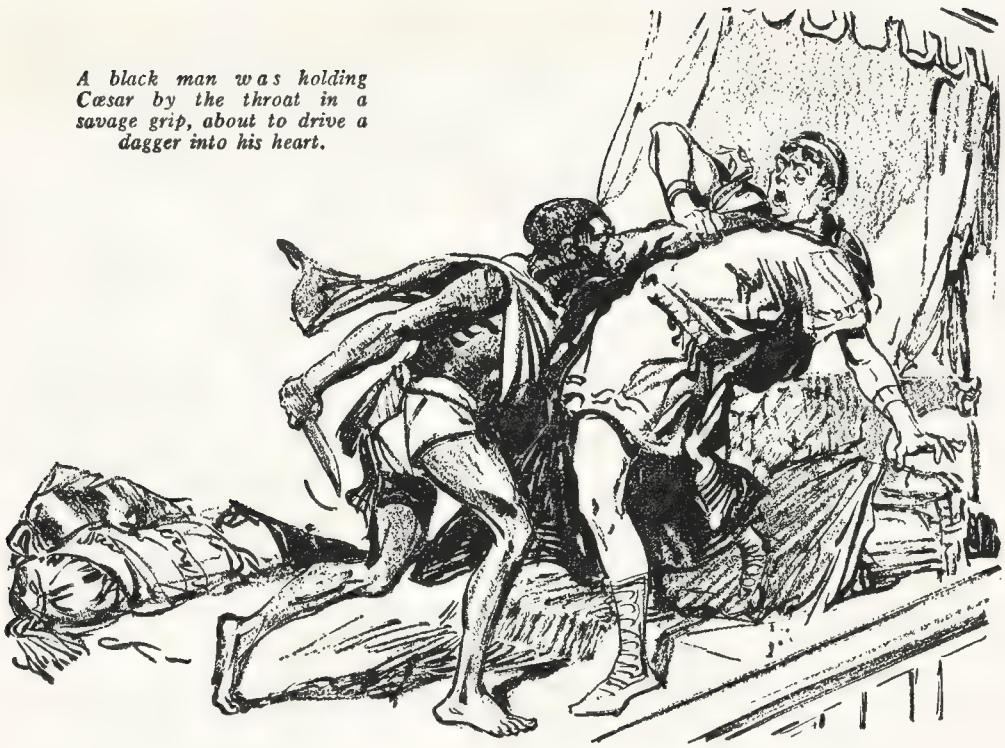
"We must scatter," said Mallius Lepos. "Each man for himself."

"We shall stick together, Mallius Lepos," said Von Harben.

"To the end," replied the Roman.

"And here is Gabula," said Von Harben, as the black joined them. "He shall come with us."

"We cannot desert the brave Gabula," said Mallius Lepos, "but the first thing for us to do is to find a hiding-place."



A black man was holding Cæsar by the throat in a savage grip, about to drive a dagger into his heart.

"There is a low wall across the avenue," said Von Harben, "and there are trees beyond it."

"Come, then," said Mallius Lepos. "It is as good for now as any other place."

The three men hurried across the avenue and scaled the low wall, finding themselves in a garden so overgrown with weeds and underbrush that they at once assumed it was deserted.

Creeping through the weeds and forcing their way through the underbrush, they came to the rear of a house. A broken door, hanging by one hinge, windows from which the wooden blinds had fallen, and an accumulation of rubbish upon the threshold, marked the dilapidated structure as a deserted house.

"Perhaps this is just the place for us to hide until night," said Von Harben.

"Its proximity to the colosseum is its greatest advantage," said Mallius Lepos, "for they will be sure to believe that we have rushed as far from our dungeon as we could. Let us go in and investigate. We must be sure that the place is uninhabited."

IN the rear room, which had been the kitchen, was a crumbling brick oven in one corner, a bench and a dilapidated table. Crossing the kitchen they entered an apartment beyond and saw at once that these two rooms constituted all that there was to the house.

The front room was large; as the blinds at the windows facing the avenue had not fallen, it was dark within. In one corner they saw a ladder reaching to a trapdoor in the ceiling, which evidently led to the roof of the building, and two or three feet below the ceiling and running entirely across the end of the room where the ladder arose was a false ceiling, which formed a tiny loft just below the roof beams, a place probably utilized by former tenants as a storage-room.

A more careful examination of the room revealed nothing more than a pile of filthy rags against one wall, the remains perhaps of some homeless beggar's bed.

"It could not have been better," said Mallius Lepos, "if this had been built for us. Why, we have three exits if we are hard pressed—one into the back garden, one into the avenue in front and the third to the roof!"

"We can remain in safety, then," said Von Harben, "until after dark, when it should be easy to make our way unseen through the dark streets to the home of Septimus Favonius."

CHAPTER XXVI

EAST along the Via Mare from Castra Sanguinarius marched five thousand men.

The white plumes of the Waziri nodded at the back of Tarzan. Stalwart legionaries followed Maximus Præclarus, while the black warriors of the outer villages brought up the rear.

Sweating slaves dragged catapults, ballistæ, testudones, huge battering-rams and other ancient engines of war. There were scaling-ladders and wall-hooks and devices for throwing fire balls into the defenses of an enemy. The heavy engines had delayed the march and Tarzan had chafed at the delay, but he had to listen to Maximus Præclarus and Cassius Hasta and Cæcilius Metellus, all of whom had assured him that the fort, which defended the only road to Castrum Mare, could not be taken by assault without the aid of these mechanical engines of war.

Along the hot and dusty Via Mare the Waziri swung, chanting the war-songs of their people. The hardened legionaries, their heavy helmets dangling against their breasts from cords that passed about their necks, their packs on forked sticks across their shoulders, their great oblong shields hanging in their leather covers at their backs, cursed and grumbled as became veterans, while the warriors from the outer villages laughed and sang and chattered as might a party of picnickers.

As they neared the fort with its moat and embankment, its palisade and towers, slaves were bearing the body of Validus Augustus to his palace within the city, and Fulvus Fupus, surrounded by fawning sycophants, was proclaiming himself Cæsar, though he trembled inwardly in contemplation of what fate might lie before him—for though he was a fool he knew that he was not popular and that many a noble patrician with a strong following had a better right to the imperial purple than he.

Throughout the city of Castrum Mare legionaries searched for the escaped prisoners and especially for the black slave who had struck down Validus Augustus, though they were handicapped by the fact that no one had recognized Gabula, for there were few in the city and certainly none in the entourage of Cæsar who was familiar with the face of the black from distant Urambi.

A few of the thieves and five or six gladiators, who were condemned felons and not free men, had clung together in the break for freedom and presently they found themselves in hiding in a low part of the city, in a den where wine could be procured and where there were other forms of entertainment for people of their class.

"What sort of a Cæsar will this Fulvus Fupus make?" asked a burly bravo.

"He will be worse than Validus Augustus," one replied. "I have seen him in the Baths where I once worked. He is vain and dull and ignorant; even the patricians hate him."

"They say he is going to marry the daughter of Septimus Favonius."

"I saw her in the colosseum today," said another. "I know her well by sight for she used to come to the shop of my father and make purchases before I was sent to the dungeons."

"Have you ever been to the house of Septimus Favonius?" asked still another.

"Yes, I have," said the youth. "Twice I took goods there for her inspection, going through the forecourt and into the inner garden. I know the place well."

"If one like she should happen to fall into the hands of a few poor convicts they might win their freedom and a great ransom," suggested a lowbrowed fellow with evil, cunning eyes.

"And be drawn asunder by wild oxen for their pains."

"We must die anyway if we were caught."

"It is a good plan."

They drank again for several minutes in silence, evidencing that the plan was milling in their minds.

"The new Cæsar should pay an enormous ransom for his bride," remarked one villain, with an evil leer.

The youth rose eagerly to his feet.

"I will lead you to the home of Septimus Favonius and guarantee that they will open the gate for me and let me in, as I know what to say. All I need is a bundle and I can tell the slave that it contains goods that my father wishes Favonia to inspect."

"You are not such a fool as you look."

"No, and I shall have a large share of the ransom for my part in it," said the youth.

"If there is any ransom, we shall share and share alike."

NIGHT was falling as Tarzan's army halted before the defenses of Castrum Mare. Cassius Hasta, to whom the reduc-

tion of the fort had been entrusted, disposed his forces and supervised the placing of his various engines of war.

Within the city Erich von Harben and Mallius Lepos discussed the details of their plans. It was the judgment of Lepos to wait until after midnight before making any move to leave their hiding-place.

"The streets will be deserted then," said Mallius Lepos, "except for an occasional patrol upon the principal avenue and these may be easily eluded, since the torches that they carry proclaim their approach long before there is any danger of their apprehending us. I have the key to the gate of my uncle's garden, which insures that we may enter the grounds unobserved."

"Perhaps you are right," said Von Harben, "but I dread the long wait and the thought of further inaction seems unbearable."

"Have patience, my friend," said Mallius Lepos. "Fulvus Fupus will be too busy with his new Cæsarship to give heed to aught else for some time, and Favonia will be safe from him, certainly for the next few hours at least."

And as they discussed the matter, a youth knocked upon the door of the home of Septimus Favonius. Beneath the shadow of the trees along the wall darker shadows crouched. A slave bearing a lamp came to the door in answer to the knocking and, speaking through a small grille, asked who was without and what the nature of his business.

"I am the son of Tabernarius," said the youth. "I have brought fabrics from the shop of my father that the daughter of Septimus Favonius may inspect them."

"I will lead you to the home of Septimus Favonius, and guarantee that they will open the gate for me and let me in," said the youth.

The slave hesitated.

"You must remember me," said the youth. "I have been here often."

The slave held the light a little higher and peered through the grille.

"Yes," he said, "your face is familiar. I will go and ask my mistress if she wishes to see you. Wait here."

"These fabrics are valuable," said the youth, holding up a bundle, which he carried under his arm. "Let me stand just within the vestibule lest thieves set upon me and rob me."

"Very well," said the slave, and opening the gate he permitted the youth to enter. "Remain here until I return."

AS the slave disappeared into the interior of the house, the son of Tabernarius turned quickly and withdrew the bolt which secured the door. Opening it quickly he leaned out to voice a low signal.

Instantly the denser shadows beneath the shadowy trees moved and were resolved into the figures of men. Scurrying like vermin, they hurried through the doorway into the home of Septimus Favonius, and into the ante-room off the vestibule the son of Tabernarius hustled them. Then he closed both doors and waited.

Presently the slave returned. "The daughter of Septimus Favonius recalls having ordered no goods from Tabernarius," he said, "nor does she feel in any mood to inspect fabrics this night. Return them to your father and tell him that when the daughter of Septimus Favonius wishes to purchase she will come herself to his shop."

Now this was not what the son of Tabernarius desired and he racked his crafty brain for another plan, though to the slave he appeared but a stupid youth, staring at the floor in too much embarrassment even to take his departure.

"Come," said the slave, approaching the door and laying hold of the bolt, "you must be going."

"Wait," whispered the youth. "I have a message for Favonia. I did not wish anyone to know it and for that reason I spoke of bringing fabrics as an excuse."

"Where is the message and from whom?" demanded the slave, suspiciously.

"It is for her ears only. Tell her this and she will know from whom it is."

The slave hesitated.

"Fetch her here," said the youth. "It will be better that no other member of the household sees me."

THE slave shook his head. "I will tell her," he said, for he knew that Mallius Lepos and Erich von Harben had escaped from the colosseum and he guessed that the message might be from one of these.

As he hastened back to his mistress the son of Tabernarius smiled, for though he knew not enough of Favonia to know from whom she might reasonably expect a secret message, yet he knew there were few young women who might not, at least hopefully, expect a clandestine communication.

He had not long to wait before the slave returned and with him came Favonia. Her excitement was evident as she hastened eagerly forward toward the youth.

"Tell me!" she cried. "You have brought word from him?"

The son of Tabernarius raised a forefinger to his lip to caution her to silence. "No one must know that I am here," he whispered, "and no ears but yours may hear my message. Send your slave away."

"You may go," said Favonia to the slave. "I will let the young man out when he goes,"—and the slave, glad to be dismissed, content to be relieved of responsibility, moved silently away into the shadows of a corridor and thence into that uncharted limbo into which pass slaves and other lesser people when one has done with them.

"Tell me," cried the girl, "what word do you bring? Where is he?"

"He is here," whispered the youth, pointing to the ante-room.

"Here?" exclaimed Favonia, incredulously.

"Yes, here," said the youth. "Come."

HE led her toward the door and as she approached it he seized her suddenly and, clapping a hand over her mouth, dragged her into the dark ante-room beyond.

Rough hands seized her quickly and she was gagged and bound. She heard them converse in low whispers.

"We will separate here," said one. "Two of us will take her to the place we have selected. One of you will have to leave the note for Fulvus Fupus so the palace guards will find it. The rest of you scatter and go by different routes to the deserted house across from the colosseum. Do you know the place?"

"I know it well. Many is the night that I have slept there."

"Very well," said the first speaker, who seemed to be the leader, "now be off. We have no time to waste."

"Wait," said the son of Tabernarius, "the division of the ransom has not yet been decided. Without me you could have done nothing. I should have at least half."

"Shut up or you will be lucky if you get anything," growled the leader.

"A knife between his ribs would do him good," muttered another.

"You will not give me what I asked?" demanded the youth.

"Shut up," said the leader. "Come along now, men," and carrying Favonia, whom they wrapped in a soiled and ragged cloak, they left the home of Septimus Favonius unobserved; and as two men carried the strange bundle through the dark shadows beneath the shadowy trees, the son of Tabernarius started away in the opposite direction. . . . .

He seized Favonia suddenly and, clapping a hand over her mouth, dragged her into the dark anteroom beyond.

A short time later the youth, in ragged tunic and worn sandals, approached the gates of Cæsar's palace. A legionary challenged him, holding him at a distance with the point of his pike.

"What do you loitering by the palace of Cæsar by night?" demanded the legionary sternly.

"I have a message for Cæsar," replied the youth.

The legionary guffawed. "Will you come in, or shall I send Cæsar out to you?" he demanded, ironically.

"You may take the message to him yourself, soldier," replied the other, "and if you know what is good for you you will not delay."

The seriousness of the youth's voice finally compelled the attention of the legionary.

"Well," he demanded, "out with it! What message have you for Cæsar?"

"Hasten to him and tell him that the daughter of Septimus Favonius has been abducted and that if he hastens he will find her in the deserted house that stands upon the corner opposite the chariot entrance to the colosseum."

"Who are you?" demanded the legionary.

"Never mind," said the youth. "Tomorrow I shall come for my reward." And he turned and sped away before the legionary could detain him.

"AT this rate midnight will never come," said Von Harben.

Mallius Lepos laid a hand upon the shoulder of his friend. "You are impatient, but remember that it will be safer for Favonia, as well as for us, if we wait until after midnight, for the streets now must be full of searchers. All afternoon we have heard soldiers passing. It is a miracle that they have not searched here."

"*Ps-s-t!*" cautioned Von Harben. "What was that?"

"It sounded like the creaking of the gate in front of the house," said Mallius Lepos.

"They are coming," said Von Harben.

The three men seized the swords with which they had armed themselves, after they had rushed the colosseum guard, and following a plan they had already decided upon in the event that searchers approached their hiding place, they scaled the ladder and crept out upon the roof. Leaving the trapdoor pushed slightly to one side, they listened to the sounds that were now coming from below, ready to take instant action should there be any indication that the searchers might mount the ladder to the roof.

Von Harben heard voices coming from below. "Well, we made it," said one, "and no one saw us. Here come the others now."

Von Harben heard the gate creak again on its rusty hinges; then the door of the house opened and he heard several people enter.

"This is a good night's work," said a gruff voice.

"Is she alive? I cannot hear her breathe."

"Take the gag from her mouth."

"And let her scream for help?"

"We can keep her quiet. She is worth nothing to us dead."

"All right, take it out."

"Listen, you, we will take the gag out of your mouth—but if you scream it will be the worse for you!"

"I shall not scream," said a woman's voice in familiar tones which set Von Harben's heart to palpitating, though he felt sure that it was nothing more than a vivid imagination that suggested the seeming familiarity.

"We shall not hurt you," said a man's voice, "if you keep quiet and Cæsar sends the ransom."

"And if he does not send it?" asked the girl.

"Then, perhaps, your father, Septimus Favonius, will pay the price we ask."

"God!" muttered Von Harben. "Did you hear that, Lepos?"

"I heard," replied the Roman.

"Then come," whispered Von Harben. "Come, Gabula, Favonia is below."

CASTING discretion to the wind, Von Harben tore the trap from the opening in the roof and dropped into the darkness below, followed by Mallius Lepos and Gabula.

"Favonia!" he cried. "It is I. Where are you?"

"Here," cried the girl.

Rushing blindly in the direction of her voice, Von Harben encountered one of the abductors. The fellow grappled with him, while, terrified by fear that the legionaries were upon them, the others bolted from the building. As they went they left the door open and the light of a full moon dissipated the darkness of the interior, revealing Von Harben struggling with a burly fellow who had seized the young man by the throat and was now trying to draw his dagger from its sheath.

Instantly Mallius Lepos and Gabula were upon him and a quick thrust of the former's sword put a definite period to the earthly rascality of the criminal.

Freed from his antagonist, Von Harben leaped to his feet and ran to Favonia, who was lying upon a pile of dirty rags against the wall. Quickly he cut her bonds and soon they had her story.

"If you are no worse for the fright," said Mallius Lepos, "we may thank these scoundrels for simplifying our task, for here we are ready to try for our escape a full three hours earlier than we had hoped."

"Let us lose no time then," said Von Harben. "I shall not breathe freely until I am across the wall."

"I believe we have little to fear now," said Mallius Lepos. "The wall is poorly guarded. There are many places where we can scale it and I know a dozen places where we can find boats that are used by the fishermen of the city. What lies beyond is upon the knees of the gods."

Gabula, who had been standing in the doorway, closed the door quickly and crossed to Von Harben. "Lights are coming down the avenue, Bwana," he said. "I think many men are coming. Perhaps they are soldiers."

THE four listened intently until they made out distinctly the measured tread of marching men.

"Some more searchers," said Mallius Lepos. "When they have passed on their way, it will be safe to depart."

The light from the torches of the legionaries approached until it shone through the cracks in the wooden blinds, but it did not pass on as they had expected. Mallius Lepos put an eye to an opening in one of the blinds.

"They have halted in front of the house," he said. "A part of them are turning the corner, but the rest are remaining."

They stood in silence for what seemed a long time, though it was only a few minutes and then they heard sounds coming from the garden behind the house and the light of torches was visible through the open kitchen door.

"We are surrounded," said Lepos. "They are coming in the front way. They are going to search the house."

"What shall we do?" cried Favonia in fright.

"The roof is our only hope," whispered Von Harben; but even as he spoke the sound of sandaled feet was heard upon the roof and the light of torches shone through the open trap.

"We are lost," said Mallius Lepos. "We cannot defeat an entire century of legionaries."

"We can fight them, though," said Von Harben.

"And risk Favonia's life uselessly?" said Lepos.

"How can I ever thank you?" exclaimed Von Harben. "Do not thank me, my friend," said the ape-man. "Thank little Nkima!"

"You are right," said Von Harben, sadly. And then: "Wait, I have a plan! Come, Favonia, quickly. Lie down here upon the floor and I will cover you with these rags. There is no reason why we should all be taken. Mallius Lepos, Gabula and I may not escape, but they will never guess that you are here and when they are gone you can easily make your way to the guard-house in the colosseum, where the officer in charge will see that you are given protection and an escort to your home."

"Let them take me," said the girl. "If you are to be captured, let me be captured also."

"It will do no good," said Von Harben. "They will only separate us, and if you are found here with us it may bring suspicion upon Septimus Favonius."

Without further argument she threw herself upon the floor, resigned in the face of Von Harben's argument, and he covered her over with the rags of the beggar's bed.

CHAPTER XXVII

BY the time that Cassius Hasta had disposed his forces and placed his engines of war before the defenses of Castrum Mare, he discovered that it was too dark to open his assault that day, but he could carry out another plan that he had and so he advanced toward the gate, accompanied by Tarzan, Metellus and Præclarus and preceded by torch-bearers and a legionary bearing a flag of truce.

Within the fort great excitement had reigned from the moment that the advancing troops had been sighted. Word had been sent to Fulvus Fupus and reinforcements had been hurried to the fort. It was assumed by all that Sublatus had inaugurated a new raid upon a larger scale than usual, but they were ready to meet it, nor did they anticipate defeat.

As the officer commanding the defenders saw the party approaching with a flag of truce, he demanded from a tower gate the nature of their mission.

"I have two demands to make upon Validus Augustus," said Cassius Hasta. "One is that he free Mallius Lepos and Erich von Harben and the other is that he permit me to return to Castrum Mare and enjoy the privileges of my station."

"Who are you?" demanded the officer.

"I am Cassius Hasta. You should know me well."

"The gods are good!" cried the officer.

"Long live Cassius Hasta! Down with Fulvus Fupus!" cried a hoarse chorus of rough voices.

SOME one threw open the gates, and the officer, an old friend of Cassius Hasta, rushed out and embraced him.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded Cassius Hasta. "What has happened?"

"Validus Augustus is dead! He was assassinated at the games today and Fulvus Fupus has assumed the title of Cæsar. You are indeed come in time! All Castrum Mare will welcome you!"

Along the Via Mare from the castle to the lake shore and across the pontoon bridge to the island marched the army of the new Emperor of the East, while the news spread through the city and crowds gathered and shrieked their welcome to Cassius Hasta.

In a deserted house across the avenue from the colosseum four fugitives awaited the coming of the legionaries of Fulvus Fupus.

It was evident that the soldiers intended to take no chances. They entirely surrounded the building and they seemed to be in no hurry to enter.

Von Harben had had ample time to cover Favonia with the rags, so that she was entirely concealed before the legionaries entered simultaneously from the garden, the avenue and the roof, torch-bearers lighting their way.

"It is useless to resist," said Mallius Lepos to the officer who accompanied the men in from the avenue. "We will return to the dungeons peaceably."

"Not so fast," said the officer. "Where is the girl?"

"Of what girl do you speak?" challenged Mallius Lepos.

"The daughter of Septimus Favonius, of course."

"How should we know?" demanded Von Harben.

"You abducted her and brought her here," replied the officer. "Search the room," he commanded—and a moment later a legionary uncovered Favonia and raised her to her feet.

The officer laughed derisively as he ordered the three men disarmed.

"Wait," said Von Harben. "What are you going to do with the daughter of Septimus Favonius? Will you see that she has a safe escort to her father's house?"

"I am taking my orders from Cæsar," replied the officer.

"What has Cæsar to do with this?" demanded Von Harben.

"He has ordered us to bring Favonia to the palace and to slay her abductors upon the spot."

"Then, by God, Cæsar shall pay for us all with legionaries," cried Von Harben, and with his sword he fell upon the officer in the doorway, while Gabula and Mallius Lepos, spurred by a similar determination to sell their lives as dearly as possible, rushed those who were descending the ladder and entering the kitchen door.

Taken by surprise and momentarily disconcerted by the sudden and unexpected assault, the legionaries fell back.

The officer, who managed to elude Von Harben's thrust, escaped from the building and summoned a number of the legionaries who were armed with pikes.

"There are three men in that room," he said, "and a woman. Kill the men, but be sure that the woman is not harmed. But wait—"

In the avenue the officer saw people running; heard them shouting. He saw them stop as they were questioned by some of his legionaries, whom he had left in the avenue. He had not given the final order for his pike-men to enter the building, because his curiosity had momentarily distracted his attention. As he turned now, however, to order them in, his attention was again distracted by a tumult of voices that rose in great cheers and rolled up the avenue from the direction of the bridge that connects the city with the Via Mare and the fort. As he hesitated, he saw the flare of many torches and heard the blare of trumpets, the thud of marching feet.

WHAT had happened? He had known, as had all in Castrum Mare, that the forces of Sublatus were camped before the fort, but he knew that there had been no battle and so this could not be the army of Sublatus entering Castrum Mare; but it was equally strange if the defenders of Castrum Mare should be marching away from the fort while it was menaced by an enemy army! He could not understand these things, nor could he understand why the people were cheering.

As he stood there watching the approach of the marching column, the shouts of the people took on form and he distinctly heard the name of Cassius Hasta.

"What has happened?" he demanded, shouting to the men in the street.

"Cassius Hasta has returned at the head of a big army, and Fulvus Fupus has already fled and is in hiding!" they answered.

The shouted question and the equally loud reply were heard to all within the room.

"We are saved!" cried Mallius Lepos. "Cassius Hasta will harm no friend of Septimus Favonius! Aside now, you fools, if you know when you are well off!" And he advanced toward the doorway.

"Back, men," cried the officer. "Back to the avenue! Let no hand be raised against Mallius Lepos or these other friends of Cassius Hasta, Emperor of the East!"

"I guess this fellow knows which side his bread is buttered on," commented Von Harben, with a grin.

TOGETHER Favonia, Von Harben, Lepos and Gabula stepped from the deserted building into the avenue. Approaching them they saw the head of a column of marching men; flaming torches lighted the scene until it was almost as bright as day.

"There is Cassius Hasta," exclaimed Mallius Lepos. "It is indeed he, but who are those with him?"

"They must be Sanguinarians," said Favonia. "But look, one of them is garbed like a barbarian, and see the strange, black warriors with their white plumes that are marching behind them."

"I have never seen the like in all my life," exclaimed Mallius Lepos.

"Neither have I," said Von Harben, "but I am sure that I recognize them, for their fame is great and they answer the description that I have heard at least a thousand times."

"Who are they?" asked Favonia.

"The white giant is Tarzan of the Apes and the black warriors are his Waziri fighting-men."

AT sight of the legionaries standing before the house, Cassius Hasta halted the column.

"Where is the centurion in command of these troops?" he demanded.

"It is I, glorious Cæsar," replied the officer, who had come to arrest the abductors of Favonia.

"Does it happen that you are one of the detachments sent out by Fulvus Fupus to search for Mallius Lepos and the barbarian, Von Harben?"

"We are here, Cæsar," cried Mallius Lepos, while Favonia, Von Harben and Gabula followed behind him.

"May the gods be praised!" exclaimed Cassius Hasta, as he embraced his old friend. "But where is the barbarian chieftain from Germania, whose fame has reached even to Castra Sanguinarius?"

"This is he," said Mallius Lepos. "This is Erich von Harben."

Tarzan stepped nearer.

"You are Erich von Harben?" he asked in English.

"And you are Tarzan of the Apes, I know," returned Von Harben, in the same language.

"You look every inch a Roman," said Tarzan with a smile.

"I feel every inch a barbarian, however," grinned Von Harben.

"Roman or barbarian, your father will be glad when I bring you back to him."

"You came here in search of me, Tarzan of the Apes?" demanded Von Harben.

"And I seem to have arrived just in time," said the ape-man.

"How can I ever thank you?" exclaimed Von Harben.

"Do not thank me, my friend," said the ape-man. "Thank little Nkima!"

THE END.

REMARKABLE gifts of imagination and writing ability have enabled Edgar Rice Burroughs to produce these uniquely fascinating romances of Tarzan. He has for months been working on a new and even more engaging story for Blue Book Magazine readers, which we hope to begin in an early—perhaps the next—issue.

The big race was on —the race destined to set a record that should stand for all time.

Twenty-two DOGS

By VICTOR LAURISTON and W. DE CARTIER

THIS is a saga of the North—a tale of a man and a woman and some dogs.

The story of the man and the dogs, and of the great race they ran, has been told and applauded wherever two of the Arctic clan were gathered together. Some wondered at the indomitable will-power of the man which carried him on and on long after he had supposedly reached the last limit of human endurance. But the part the woman played was known only to the principals themselves; and for reasons of their own they kept the matter private.

The woman's name was Olga. Her father was Captain Sven Larsen.

A rough character and unscrupulous, was Captain Sven Larsen. Those there were who asserted that he had but one redeeming thing about him, and that was his daughter Olga.

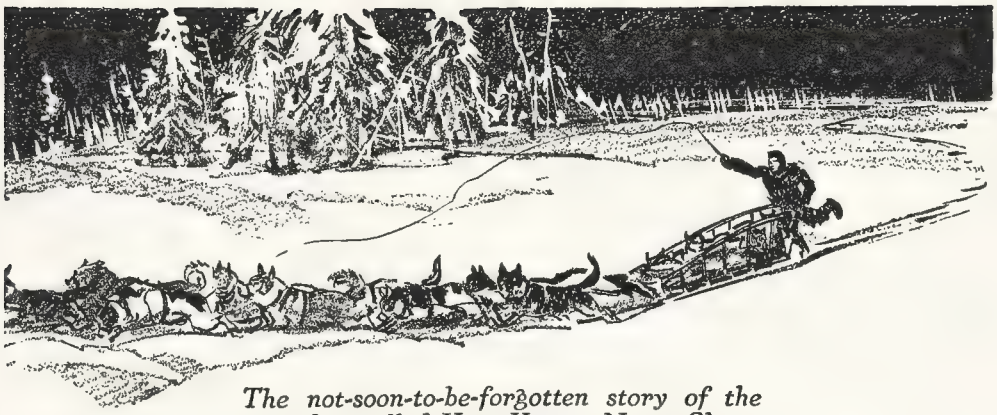
With his schooner this gruff old sea pirate had poached the Bering Sea seal-rookeries until the revenue cutters made it too hot for him. Then he transferred his talents and activities to the Siberian fur-trade.

Glass beads, calico and other time-honored trade goods found no place in Captain Sven Larsen's operations. A few barrels of cheap whisky or alcohol formed his stock in trade. So any other trader so unfortunate as to find himself following the Captain's itinerary found the pickings decidedly scant.

The Captain was fast becoming rich when his operations came to grief. A Russian gunboat one day hove on the scene. The Captain had barely time to slip his anchor and flee into the Arctic Ocean with the gunboat at his heels. Eventually he evaded the Russians; but his schooner was crushed in the ice off the northern coast of Siberia, and the Captain got ashore with little except his life.

From the natives he obtained a team of little woolly Siberian dogs and set out overland. By spring he had made his way to Bering Strait, crossed over by native skin-boat, and thence got to Nome.

WHEN he arrived at Nome, that classic of Northern dog-racing, the All-Alaska Sweepstakes, was under way. A grueling



The not-soon-to-be-forgotten story of the man they called Hans Hansen Never-Sleeps after a great four-hundred-mile dog race.

contest it was, four hundred miles, from Nome to Candle Creek and return.

To incredulous listeners Captain Sven Larsen voiced his deep, profound and alcoholic conviction that a team of the little woolly Siberian dogs would make a good showing, even in the great classic itself.

Sneers and jeers greeted the statement. But sneers and jeers served only to rouse the Captain's obstinacy to fighting pitch. The final outcome was his announced determination to enter, next year, a team of Siberians in the All-Alaska Sweepstakes.

Begun several years before, as a modest event in which any sourdough with a fairly good team of huskies felt justified in competing, the All-Alaska Sweepstakes had that year developed into a sport for kings. Nome's richest mines were at their peak of production; and the various gold dust princes found outlet for their newly-won wealth in backing their favorite drivers to the limit. Fast dogs were purchased at unheard-of prices. Several of the leading drivers had stables of from fifty to a hundred dogs in training, that from seven to ten of the best might be picked for the race.

The husky had long been the work-horse of the North. Now he was largely cultivated for a test where racing speed and endurance were the essentials. To this end crosses of bird-dog and various members of the hound family produced long-legged progeny that little resembled the time-honored steed of the Arctic.

In short, Nome was coming to take its dog-racing seriously.

Captain Sven Larsen with his Siberians furnished the element of comic relief. True to his word, on his last trip that fall with his new schooner, the Captain brought back forty of the little dogs which he had purchased from the Siberian natives.

The camp looked at the Siberians and snickered. Little woolly things they were, in most cases so small that the long-legged racing dogs of the other contestants could have walked right over them without touching.

The more the camp laughed, the more vehemently the Captain protested, with deep salt-water oaths, that he'd show 'em.

TOUGH and conscienceless old buccaneer that he was, Captain Sven Larsen had one tender spot, and that was for his daughter Olga. Olga was almost everything the Captain was not. Slender and sweet, with the blonde Norwegian type of beauty, she manifestly favored her dead mother. Though even she trembled when her father roared at her in his deep-sea voice, Olga was the only one who dared face him in his angry moods.

Olga had been attending school in the States, but that summer the Captain sent for her. Almost from the day she landed in Nome, she was besieged by suitors.

Most favored of all the suitors was Pete Christiansen, big, burly and forty, better known as the Lucky Swede, and owner of one of the richest claims in the camp. That fact alone won him the strong favor of Captain Sven Larsen.

Quite negligible as a competitor was Hans Hansen—later known to Nome as Hans Hansen Never-Sleeps. Hansen was twenty-four, lithe, muscular, with a square determined chin and a complexion to make the average schoolgirl envious. He adored Olga; more than that, he adored the very ground that Olga walked on. But Hans Hansen was poorer than poverty.

When Hans heard that Captain Sven Larsen wanted a man to help look after the forty woolly Siberian dogs, he promptly applied for the job because of the opportunity it would give him of an occasional glimpse of Olga.

To handle the actual training, the Captain hired Jan Erickson, an experienced dog-musher. Erickson would drive the team to be ultimately picked for the race. Hans Hansen was allowed to clean the stables, feed the dogs and perform any other chores that came handy. As a special favor, he was occasionally allowed to take the scrub team out for exercise.

The pick of the dogs looked little better than the scrubs. To obtain them, Captain Sven Larsen had simply descended on a couple of native villages and bought every dog offered.

After the first try-out, Erickson was too disgusted for words. He at once discarded the greater part of the dogs as too worthless for any further trial, and turned them over to Hans. What dogs were left, Erickson regarded dubiously.

Hans, for his part, did all the rough and dirty work, caught an occasional glimpse of Olga, won an occasional smile, and was happy accordingly.

"If Pete Christiansen asks you to marry him," the Captain told his daughter, "you say *yes*, and no damn' nonsense about it."

That, he felt, settled the matter. On shipboard, he was accustomed to settling everything and everybody in a manner quite as peremptorily.

"Yes, Father," promised Olga, dutifully.

But when Lucky Swede, red-faced and perspiring, again and again attempted to propose, invariably something arose to distract him and change the subject.

Lucky Swede felt himself baffled. Despite his present wealth, he had, socially, not progressed far beyond the loutish longshoreman and casual laborer he had been all his life till he struck it rich. Baffled by Olga,—deliberately, he saw,—he came to lean upon Captain Sven Larsen's favor. Pete Christiansen had great confidence in the Captain's persuasive powers; and after repeated failures in his attempts to propose, he set his thick wits to work to jockey the Captain into turning the trick for him.

SUMMER turned to fall, fall to winter. April, and the day of the great race, were drawing near. Still Lucky Swede, defeated by Olga's persistent refusal to let him propose, wrestled with the problem of devising a way out.

After deep thought, he at length devised a scheme he regarded as a masterpiece. So he sought out the Captain and introduced what had become the Captain's favorite topic.

"Ay tank ay goin' bet som' money on dis race, Captain Larsen. Ay yust lak to look at dem Siberians of yours. Ay bet on dem if dey look goot."

Nothing loath, the Captain took Lucky home with him and out to the kennels.

OLGA had not expected the Captain home so soon. She had run out to the kennels "to see the dogs," she told Hans. She heard the Captain's deep-sea voice a long way off. Swiftly she decided that she did not want him to find her there.

Glancing wildly about for a way of escape, she finally darted behind a partition of an unused portion of the kennel. Heedlessly, Hans Hansen followed.

A moment later, when the Captain entered with Lucky, the place was apparently empty of other human occupants.

Hardly daring to draw breath, the two watched through a crack in the partition while Lucky examined the dogs. Finally they heard him speak:

"Captain, ay ban goot friendt of yourn, but ay lak mak' friendly bet with you. Ay bet you hun'red t'ousan' dollar against Olga, dem dogs don't win."

"What's that?" roared the Captain. "You want to bet that my Siberians are going to lose?"

"Yaw, ay bet you yust lak dat: one hun'red t'ousan' dollar 'gainst Olga."

The Captain clenched his mighty fist. He glared at Pete Christiansen.

Then he smiled. Manifestly, this was a bet worth taking: a regular "heads I win, tails you lose" proposition.

If the woolly Siberians won the race, Lucky would have to pay him one hundred thousand dollars. If they lost, Lucky would get Olga for his wife—which also was entirely satisfactory to the Captain.

The Captain smiled some more, this time a little grimly. The fine points of Lucky's scheme began to dawn upon him. He had not been entirely blind to the fact that Lucky's progress with Olga had been most discouraging.

"Lucky," mused the Captain, "thinks my Siberians are sure to lose. He wants to

"You've made a bet, Lucky," said the Captain. "I bet Olga against one hundred thousand dollars that my Siberians win."

put me in a place where I'll have to make Olga marry him. Well, fair enough! I meant to make her marry Lucky anyway. If the Siberians lose, I'll do it. But if they win—I'll take the hundred thousand, and as for Olga—"

"You've made a bet, Lucky," said the Captain aloud. "I bet Olga against one hundred thousand dollars that my Siberians win. That's the bet."

"Ay bet yust that way," agreed Lucky. "We mak' Al Jorgensen the holder stakes. Ay put up hun'red t'ousan' dollar; you put up paper dat say Olga marry me if Siberians lose." And the two departed.

THEIR footsteps had hardly died away when Hans most unexpectedly found a pair of arms about his neck and a white face pressed against his shabby coat.

The Captain returned for supper with liquor on his breath. Once or twice he chuckled grimly. Manifestly he was pleased with himself. Olga, pale and preoccupied, said not a word till the meal was nearly over.

"Father," she suddenly demanded, "after you have picked out the team you want Erickson to drive in the race, will you give me the rest of the dogs to do with as I please?"

Captain Sven Larsen sat gaping at her. "W-what?"

She had to repeat the question before he was sure he had heard aright.

"Why, Olga, girl, I'll do better than that. After the race is over, I'll give you your choice of the whole bunch—the winning team if you want it."

Tonight the Captain was unusually generous. He not only felt an absurd affection for Olga, but she was a distinct financial asset to him.

"No," she insisted, "I don't want that. Please give me just what I ask, and don't ask me why, because it is a secret of my own."

Perhaps the Captain had, concealed somewhere, some slight remnant of conscience. Perhaps he felt a little guilty.

"By Godfrey, Olga, I don't know what it is all about, but I'm going to give you just what you ask. I'll tell Erickson to pick out the team he wants tomorrow, and you can have the rest to do what you want with. Skin 'em fer their hide and tallow, if you want. I reckon that's about all some of them are good for. The way I bought them, I didn't have any chance to pick and choose. But I got one good team out of the bunch, and that's plenty. So if you want the rest of them, they're yours after

Erickson has picked the team for the race. He'll only take twelve, so that leaves you plenty."

Like many another pirate of old, Captain Sven Larsen made it his boast that his word, once given, was good. Olga knew that the matter was settled. The Captain might rant and roar, but he would not go back on his word. She smiled. More than that, she astonished the old sinner by planting a kiss on his weather-beaten cheek.

"Mine to do whatever I want with?" she reminded him.

The Captain grunted.

UPON the seventh of April a dense throng lined the beach in front of Nome. It was the date set for the All-Alaska Sweepstakes.

The drivers had been given their instructions, and eager teams were strung out back of the starting-post, ready for the word *"Go!"*

The teams were to start ten minutes apart and race against time. Every dog in a team at the start must be taken through to Candle Creek, the turning point, and brought back again, dead or alive, to the finishing post at Nome.

Only eight teams appeared for the start. Several prospective entrants had decided at the last moment that the company was too fast for them, and had dropped out.

First to leave the starting-post was Delbar, with a team of seven dogs.

Ten minutes later LaFrance, driving a team of ten dogs, made his start.

A few minutes later a cheer from the crowd told that Scotty Stuart, the favorite, had pulled up to the starting post. Scotty had won first money three years in succession and was strong favorite in the betting to win first money again this year.

He was driving the fastest ten dogs he had ever driven; but even so, he admitted that he was up against the stiffest competition of his career, and would have to break all previous records to win.

The roar of cheering as Scotty pulled out changed to a roar of laughter as Jan Erickson drove Captain Sven Larsen's team of twelve Siberians up to the post. A commingling of jeers and cheers followed them as they pulled out.

"Look at the rats!"

"Go it, you jack-rabbits!"

When the racket had subsided sufficiently for the starter to make himself heard, the next team was announced. It was a dark horse. No one had ever heard of the driver. The crowd craned necks, gasped, snickered.

Captain Sven Larsen also looked. His mouth dropped open. He rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Here came almost the entire balance of his kennel of Siberians—twenty-two little woolly dogs strung out two and two in front of a racing sled, with Hans Hansen, all togged out as a racing driver, at the handle-bars.

Hans looked frightened. He looked more frightened still as Captain Sven Larsen, with a bellow, came charging through the crowd. Olga, clinging to his coat-tails, towed in his wake, impeded him a little.

The moment they reached the open space cleared for the racers, Olga got in front of her father.

"This is my team, Father, and you said I could do what I liked with them. I am entering them in this race, and Hans is driving for me."

The Captain's face grew purple. He opened his mouth to say something. He changed his mind, but forgot to close his mouth. Thus he stood a moment, his lips working.

"Well, I'll be damned!" is what he finally did say.

He turned back into the crowd.

OLGA, lingering, leaned over and whispered to Hans. Hans looked quite as astonished as had the Captain a moment earlier. To be sure that he understood aright, she repeated her words.

Then, blushing, she ran back into the crowd. Hans stood, still staring at her in dazed bewilderment.

In fact, he was in such a daze that the starter had to wake him and tell him the starting signal had been given.

"Get out of the way of the other teams, can't you?" he added.

Hans finally did get away with his twenty-two little woolly Siberians.

The standing of the various teams in the public estimation was reflected in the send-off given each. Delbar and La France had been given a fair amount of applause from friends and backers. Scotty Stuart took off amid a roar of enthusiasm that could be heard for miles. The square-shooting little Scotsman had won first money for the past three years, and win or lose, could be counted on to make a race of it.

Erickson had pulled out amid laughter

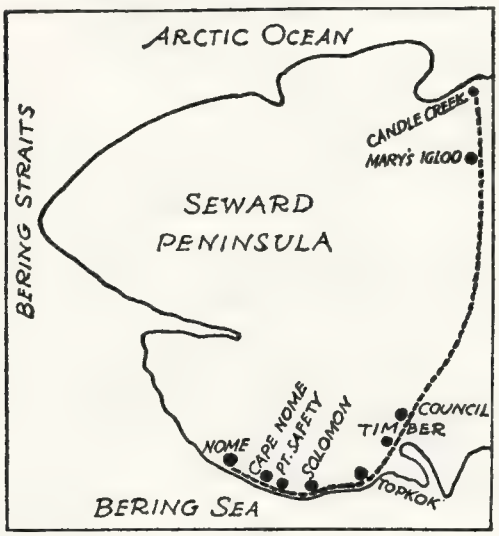
and cat-calls. But when Hans Hansen left, a storm of cheers and laughter broke that continued long after he had vanished from view down the trail.

Dubois, Ringold and Nelson pulled out at ten-minute intervals while the merriment over Hansen's take-off still continued.

The big race was on.

The All-Alaska Sweepstakes, the greatest sporting event in dog-racing in the world's history, was under way; and the one greatest race in the history of the All-Alaska Sweepstakes was being run—the race destined to set a record that should stand for all time.

From now till the finish of the race, Nome would know but little sleep.



FOR seventy-five miles the course followed the coast. Road-houses and mining camps every few miles were in telephonic touch with Nome. From these could be expected prompt and constant reports on the progress of the racers.

Then, between Council City and Mary's Igloo, came a long stretch without telephone connection—a blank space into which the teams would vanish so that no further word of them could come until, hours later, they emerged on the other side.

Then, thirty miles farther, was Candle Creek, the turning point. This reached, the teams would return over the same trail to Nome.

Four hundred miles of trail in all, it was, over hill and dale and blizzard-swept tundra.

The teams off, the crowd dispersed, but not to go home. Every saloon and public building had its bulletin-board. On these boards the progress of the racers was chalked as fast as the telephone reports came in from down the trail.

Almost before the last team left, reports of the first team began to come in. From Cape Nome Road-house, Port Safety, Solomon and Cheruk, came these reports. The race was still too young, however, to judge the merits of the teams. All passed these places in the same order in which they had left Nome.

At Topkok, fifty miles out, came the first change: Scotty Stuart had overtaken and passed Delbar and La France, and was first in. The bulletin read:

> Scotty first in; stopping to give dogs light feed; expects to stop half-hour at Topkok.

Then Topkok again:

> Erickson with Captain Larsen's Siberians pulled into Topkok 25 minutes after Scotty; did not stop but went on through. Scotty Stuart pulled out behind Erickson after 25 minutes' rest. Other teams in sight coming into Topkok.

Ten minutes later:

> Topkok. Four teams pull into Topkok together: Delbar, Ringold, Nelson, La France. All go on without stopping. Two more teams in sight.

Ten minutes later:

> Dubois and Hansen pull in. Dubois has blown up. Decided that his dogs cannot stand the pace, and will quit here. Hansen goes on, but is liable to blow up any time. His 22 dogs making the poorest time of any team in the race, and he is already carrying two exhausted dogs on his sled.

Timber Road-house, the next station, reported no changes in the relative positions of the teams. Erickson still led with Scotty Stuart close behind. The other drivers were fairly well bunched, except Hansen, who was half an hour behind and now carrying four exhausted dogs on his sled. Hansen would undoubtedly blow up soon.

Council City, seventy-five miles out, was next to report on the bulletin boards:

> Council. Scotty Stuart first team in. Will unhitch dogs and rest three hours.

Council, forty-five minutes later:

> Erickson pulls in with Nelson close behind. Erickson's Siberians proving surprise of race; travel with sidelong lope that carries them over ground at good speed and seem tireless. Is anybody's race right now. Nelson is first in time now and looks good. Erickson and Nelson both stopping for rest.

Council, forty minutes later:

Delbar, Ringold and La France pull in. Ringold and La France each with one dog on sleigh and balance of team very tired. Pace too fast for them, running their dogs off their feet; both stopping for rest.

Council, fifty minutes later:

Hansen pulls in with his 22 Siberians and carrying five dogs on his sled. Has made slowest time of any team in the race and will probably blow up here.

Council, twenty minutes later:

Hansen gave his dogs light feed and went on carrying three dogs on sleigh. Balance of dogs look tired and need rest. Hansen is sure to blow up soon; probably just going on to see how far he can get before he has to quit. Balance of teams and drivers resting here.

For an hour no change came in the bulletin. Then from Council City:

Scotty Stuart pulls out after 3½ hours rest. Driver and dogs both in good shape.

Council, ten minutes later:

Erickson and Nelson pull out, Nelson in lead; both have had two hours' rest and teams in good shape.

Council, two hours later:

Delbar and La France pull out together; both teams seem sore and stiff; several dogs limping.

Council, twenty minutes later:

Ringold has blown up; when awakened and told that all others in race had gone, said: "Don't give a damn if they have. Know when I'm beat. Had to cut my dogs all to pieces to keep up to here; pace too fast for me; get to hell out and let me sleep."

ALL of Nome heaved a sigh as the last bulletin was posted. All contestants who were still in the race had entered the great blank area of the course, from which no reports were possible. The next telephone station was at Mary's Igloo, and it would be hours before the racers would be heard from again.

What was happening to them out there in the darkness of the Arctic trail? Rumor and surmise ran rife. Hans Hansen with his twenty-two Siberians had departed into the unknown a full hour before the next team driven by Scotty Stuart followed. But Hansen's dogs were tired and weary, whereas Stuart's team were fresh from their rest at Council.

Rumor reported that Hansen had a secret cache on the trail where he was resting—that he was going right on till his dogs quit—that he had blown up and had returned to Council. One rumor was no sooner silenced than another arose.

The Captain and Olga stood watching the bulletins till far into the night.

The old pirate showed her unusual consideration, but after that first exclamation, he had said nothing concerning Hans and her entry. From time to time he stole covert glances at her face, seeming to wonder just how much she might have guessed.

Finally, realizing that there would be no further news for hours to come, they went home. Olga was about to bid him goodnight, when he stopped her:

"The boy can't win! But by Godfrey, he's got guts. If I had it to do over again, I'd give him that other team Erickson is driving." Then, suddenly: "What was it you whispered to him as he pulled out?"

Olga blushed furiously:

"Oh, those were just my final instructions I gave him."

"Hr-r-rumph!" grunted the Captain. Then, clumsily patting her shoulder: "Away to bed with you, and don't lie awake all night thinking of the young scoundrel."

WHEN, next morning, they once more went downtown, a single sentence on the bulletin-board greeted them:

No news of any of the teams since they left Council. Rumors were still rife, however. One, to the effect that Hansen had blown up shortly after he left Council, was generally accepted.

Just before noon the silence of the wire was broken:

Mary's Igloo. Scotty Stuart arrived; reports passing Hans Hansen two miles back; Hansen carrying six dogs on his sled, but still coming on. Stuart gave his dogs light feed and went on. Scotty's dogs tired; is carrying one dog on sled and expects to stop at Candle Creek for eight hours' rest.

Mary's Igloo, twenty minutes later:

Hansen pulls in with six dogs on sled; dogs all look tired; Hansen has stopped and is looking his team over; Hansen looks all in and will probably stop here.

Mary's Igloo, half-hour later:

Hansen gave dogs light feed and went on; he will surely blow up at Candle; has had no rest since race began—been going steady and looks dead tired; pulled out with five dogs on sled.

Mary's Igloo, two hours later:

Nelson pulled in; dogs going fair but very tired; has decided to stop for three hours' sleep.

Mary's Igloo, one hour and fifteen minutes later:

Erickson and Dubois pull in together; Erickson will stop for couple hours' rest; Dubois goes on.

Mary's Igloo, half-hour later:

La France pulls in; dogs in bad shape, very tired and limping; he will stop here for rest.

Then presently from Candle Creek, the halfway station and turning point in the race, came the report:

Scotty Stuart pulls in, beating the best time of previous races to Candle City by seven hours. He expects to give his dogs a good rest here and then drive back to Nome without a stop for further rest.

Then Candle Creek again, forty minutes later:

Hans Hansen pulls in with five dogs on sled; dogs and driver very tired; will undoubtedly stop here for rest.

Candle Creek, twenty minutes later:

Hansen gave dogs light feed and pulled out on the back trail to Nome; has not rested since leaving Nome and will undoubtedly blow up today; driver and dogs look about all in.

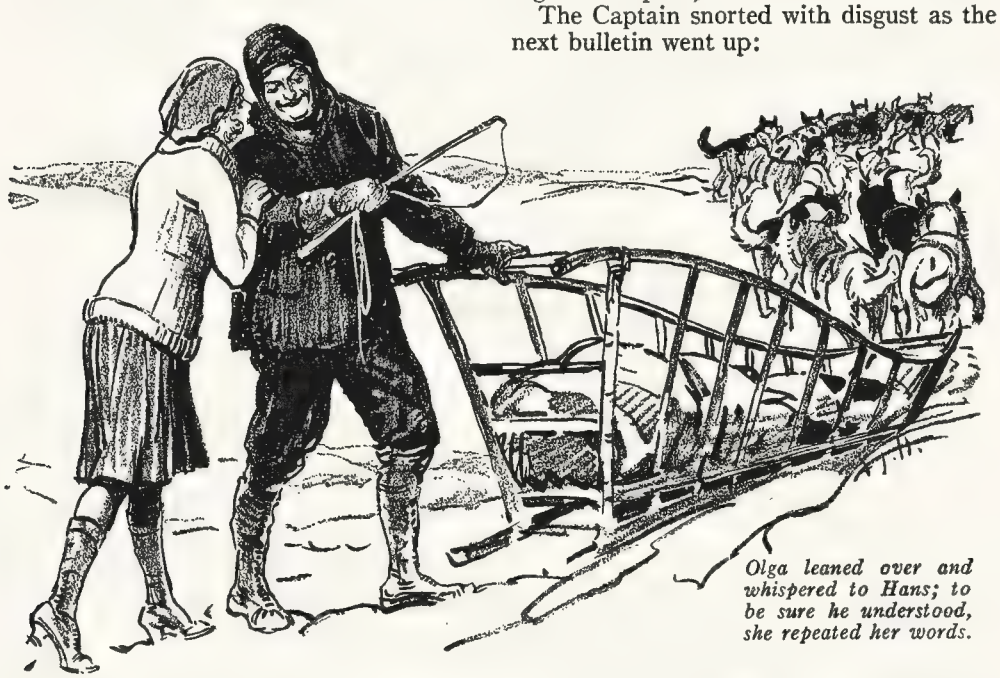
As this bulletin was chalked up on the board, Olga unconsciously clutched her father's arm.

"Hans Hansen never sleeps!" sang out an inebriated miner in the crowd. "Even money on Hans Hansen Never-Sleeps and his jack-rabbits against the field! Anyone want to bet?"

The crowd laughed good-naturedly. Even the Captain was affected, and slapped his thigh excitedly.

"By Godfrey, Olga, I'm beginning to love that young pup. The gall of him! How long does he think he can keep on going at that pace, without rest?"

The Captain snorted with disgust as the next bulletin went up:



Olga leaned over and whispered to Hans; to be sure he understood, she repeated her words.

Mary's Igloo: Erickson with his Siberians pulls out for Candle. Nelson pulls out right behind Erickson. La France blows up—has decided to quit race.

Five teams were still in the race: Scotty Stuart still resting at Candle Creek; Dubois on his way into Candle; Hansen, between Candle Creek and Mary's Igloo on the return trip, but with no rest, was expected to blow up at any time.

Then came several hours of silence. At last Candle City reported:

Erickson pulls in with Siberians—unhitches and says will rest for two hours; Erickson passed Dubois ten miles out; Dubois told him his dogs were all in and that he would quit the race at Candle Creek.

Thirty minutes later came a message from Mary's Igloo:

Hans Hansen pulled in; stopped ten minutes to give his dogs light feed and went on. Driver looks bad; dogs very tired; Hansen

has had no sleep since start of the race and will surely blow up before reaching Council City. Has five dogs on sled. Hansen has broken all previous records to Mary's Igloo on the return trip.

"Hans Hansen never sleeps and always carries dogs on his sled," sang out the inebriated miner. "Even money on Hans Hansen Never-Sleeps, against the field!"

Then came the bulletin:

Candle City. Nelson arrives.

Again came a bulletin from Candle City:

Scotty Stuart pulls out, followed by Erickson; Nelson leaves five minutes later; all teams still in the race are now on home lap.

After several hours came a message from Mary's Igloo:

Scotty Stuart pulls in, making slower time than expected; dogs sluggish; he gave them light feed and went on.

Another weary hour went by; then:

Mary's Igloo. Nelson pulls in; dogs very tired; will stop for rest. Admits he is out of race unless one of the other teams blows up. Other three teams are in the long silent stretch between Mary's Igloo and Council City and will not be heard from for hours. Hansen leading out of Mary's Igloo by six hours; Scotty Stuart second; Scotty's team in fair shape but slowing down; Erickson one hour behind Stuart, his team in next-best condition, while Hansen's team is expected to blow at any time; Hansen's time to Mary's Igloo fourteen hours better than the best previous time made, and Stuart's time to the same point is eight hours ahead of his own best time in former races.

FOR more weary hours silence reigned over the wire, broken only by the announcement of Nelson's departure from Mary's Igloo after five hours' rest.

Olga, pale and wan, haunted the bulletin-boards. Her father was little less eager for news than she was. Fifteen hours had passed since Hans Hansen had left Mary's Igloo, and in her imagination she could see him staggering across the blizzard-swept tundra, perhaps falling and lying in the snow, or losing the trail in the darkness.

On all sides he was the one topic of conversation. Was he resting on the trail? Had he blown up? Was he still coming on? On one point all were pretty much of one opinion. No man living could hold the pace he was setting, without rest.

Even his most ardent backers, who were now beginning to number not a few, admitted he would have to stop for rest a few hours at Council City, if not sooner.

But what was taking place in that great silent stretch? Betting was running wild, and all dope was off. The inebriated miner had long since bet his claim, and everything he had in the world, on Hans Hansen Never-Sleeps, and was now taking a much-needed sleep himself.

But the prodigious nickname he had fastened upon Hans remained behind with the crowd.

Olga would have watched the bulletin-board night and day, had not the Captain, with unaccustomed gentleness, insisted on taking her home. He himself returned downtown, after assuring her that he would bring her the news the moment a fresh bulletin appeared.

After interminable hours the wire again became busy. Council City telephoned:

Hans Hansen reached Council City with six dogs on sled. Hansen all in; staggered and fell like drunken man when he let go bars of sled. Has not rested since race began and will undoubtedly stop here.

Council City, ten minutes later:

Hansen went on; refused to stop; said if he ever stopped, he could not get going again for hours. Making slow time, and it appears utterly impossible for him to make seventy-five miles more to Nome in his condition. He is unable to ride, as his team is too weak to more than pull the sled-load of crippled and exhausted dogs he has on the sled. Even so, dogs are better than might have been expected.

The Captain made for home on the run. Olga was sitting by the fire.

"The boy is still coming," he roared in his great voice, that might have been heard a block away. "He's this side of Council City and still coming, and no other team in sight. By Godfrey, he's got guts! If he only had Erickson's team, he'd be a sure winner. He's taken the culls of my kennels and beaten all previous records for the course by hours. By Godfrey—"

Hours went by, and the question drifted around the crowd, "Where is Scotty Stuart?" Hansen had passed Timber Roadhouse, his team crawling along at a meager four miles an hour. Still no word of the other teams.

Then Topkok, fifty miles from the finish, was heard from:

Hansen pulled in with three dogs on sled; stopped for few minutes and offered dogs feed, but dogs refused food; put all dogs in harness and went on slowly up Topkok Hill.

Then Council City broke its long silence:

Scotty Stuart pulled in; team and driver tired but in much better shape than Hansen; Stuart rested on trail one hour during night; pulled out from Council five hours behind Hansen.

Two hours later Council City reported again—Erickson had pulled in, stopped a few minutes, and gone on.

But the crowd had lost interest in Erickson. He would get third money, possibly second; but the race for first right now lay between Hansen and Stuart.

The question in every mind was: "Can Hansen last?"

He had already accomplished more than was believable of mortal man; but could he make the other fifty miles?

There was no question of Scotty Stuart lasting. He had run the race of an expert, the greatest race of his life. He would finish the course in a matter of a few hours, for either first or second money. Which would it be? Could Hansen last?

Scotty had gained an hour on Hansen at Topkok; but Hansen by then had reached Solomon, only thirty miles from Nome, and the finish. Hansen was merely crawling along at a slow walk; but nevertheless he was still going.

Scotty had gained another hour to Solomon, but then Hansen was past Port Safety and still going—less than twenty miles from the finish.

At Port Safety they told Hans Hansen that the race was his if he only kept going. He nodded, smiled the stiff, ghastly smile of a death's-head, and kept going. He was beyond speech and stumbled drunkenly as he followed the sled along, clinging to the handle-bars to keep from falling.

Scotty too had slackened, but nevertheless had gained another hour at the Cape Nome Road-house, fifteen miles from the finish. He was too great a lover of dogs to force his team needlessly. He had made the greatest race of his career—from the standpoint of scientific dog-driving the greatest race ever run in the world's history.

But Hansen was still going, and two hours ahead.

ALL Nome saw the finish. Out of distance slowly crawled a score and more of staggering dogs, with another staggering specter clinging to the handle-bars, floundering blindly. Hansen's brain was numbed by exhaustion as he staggered to the finish. The cheering crowd meant nothing to him; the fact that he had made the course in seventy-two hours, a record for all time, meant less than nothing to his dulled senses. His face was distorted with fatigue; and when Olga spoke to him, the ghastly smile that twisted his countenance brought tears to her eyes.

The woolly little Siberians were unhitched. Twenty-two men each took one of the little dogs in his arms, and formed in line. Hans Hansen was placed on the sled, and as many men as could find room took hold of the lead lines and handle-bars. Then, chanting in unison, "Hans Hansen Never Sleeps, Hans Hansen Never Sleeps!" the whole procession marched through town and to Captain Sven Larsen's house.

WILLING hands lifted Hans Hansen, and placed him on the Captain's own bed.

Then the Captain took a hand.

"Now, beat it, everybody," he ordered. "That boy has got to get seventy-four hours' sleep before anyone disturbs him again."

"Hans Hansen Never Sleeps," chanted the crowd in reply; and started back down town to see Scotty Stuart come in.

Olga was left alone with Hans.

"I said I would marry you if you won," she suggested. "That is, if you want me."

"You bet—my life—I want you," mumbled Hans.

Olga leaned toward Hans invitingly. But he saw nothing. His head drooped on Olga's shoulder; and even while her lips puckered invitingly for the betrothal kiss, Hans belied his new nickname—he fell sound asleep.

She kissed him, anyhow, and lowered him to the pillow.

"Hr-r-rumph!" grunted Captain Sven Larsen from the doorway. "Say, Olga, what were those parting instructions you whispered to Hans at the start? Did you tell him to rest his dogs on the sled five or six at a time, the way he did all through the race? Because everyone agrees that's what won the race for him."

Olga smiled.

"No, I just told him that if he won, I'd marry him whether you liked it or not."

"Hr-r-rumph!" snorted the Captain. "That's rank mutiny! Well, what I meant to say was, that I'd hang you from the yard-arm if you didn't marry him! What's more, I won one hundred thousand dollars from Lucky Swede on this race. Hr-r-rumph! That's for your wedding-present."

The Uncertain Weapon

By CAPTAIN GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

What would happen if our fleet and our air-force joined battle with a European enemy today? A tremendously exciting story of men in action.

Illustrated by Otto Hake

THE Admiral crumpled the last radio message from his distant scouting planes and tossed it into a corner of the chart-board.

"It's a matter of minutes, now, Commander," he said to his young Chief of Staff. "Will you kindly signal all ships to go to general quarters?"

The Chief of Staff, as he transmitted the order to the fleet signal-officer, felt the blood beginning to pound in his veins. In all his career it was the first time he had heard that order given as a preliminary to a real action—he had been only an ensign when the European War had broken out, and they'd kept him at home drilling apprentice seamen.

A real action! But he wished they had more planes. He was decidedly of the modern school, was the Chief of Staff; and looking aft from the high bridge of the flagship *Arkansas* to where the other three available battleships of the Atlantic Fleet plowed along in her wake, he shook a worried head. *Wyoming, Florida, Utah*—all old ships, armed with twelve-inch guns, the last two reclaimed from reserve commissions and manned in part by scratch drafts from receiving-ships, naval training stations and the fleet reserve. Far astern loomed the huge bulk of the aircraft-carrier *Saratoga,* the only carrier then in the Atlantic which could keep up with the fleet; out somewhere beyond the horizon ahead were five light cruisers of the *Trenton* class and a screen of destroyers. The bulk of America's sea-power was concentrated in the Pacific—all that the Atlantic coast could boast in modern ships was here. If anything happened to these four, the whole Atlantic seaboard was defenseless till the Pacific Fleet could arrive on the scene. Again the Chief of Staff shook his head.

"I don't like it," he muttered; even while the gongs clattered throughout the great battleship and the crews came pouring up to quarters.

He knew well enough the character of the enemy they would have to face. Three days ago the news had come—brought out by an agent of the British secret service. The irreconcilable Reds had decided to strike a blow for their great world revolution. Secretly the four battle-cruisers of

the *Borodino* class had at last been completed as aircraft carriers under the tutelage of German experts; and while every Admiralty in Europe had supposed these ships to have been broken up for scrap, they were ready for sea—fast, modern ships carrying fifty planes apiece and capable of steaming thirty-two knots.

A sudden *coup d'état* had given the Red extremists of our enemy temporary control of the machinery of government. Whether they could maintain this control in the face of the provincial officials, the non-metropolitan garrisons and the peasants' leagues—all more or less conservative—mattered little now. They staked all on the single cast; at dawn the next morning their four aircraft carriers, escorted by two cruisers and some dozen destroyers, sailed with all secrecy. Their orders were to bombard and destroy the city of New York!

BEFORE the slow-moving forces of the provinces could hope to upset the new government, New York would be a charred and smoking shambles—a deadly blow would have been struck at conservative America, counted the most formidable foe of world revolution; simultaneously, communists in all parts of America would rise—anything might happen!

Fortunately an agent of the British secret service, shot in three places, bleeding but game, had managed to win his way out, and retained enough life to whisper his story to the lieutenant in command of a friendly frontier police post before he died. Two hours later Paris and London were informed; another hour saw the windows of the War and Navy departments in Washington begin to glow with light as officer after officer, hastily summoned from bridge-tables and dance-floors, came hurrying to the work of preparation for the impending attack.

But the gallant agent had not been able to gain the friendly frontier in time for the carriers to be intercepted by British ships. Reports from merchant shipping, furiously demanded by the Admiralty wireless, made it clear that the enemy were already in the Atlantic. The British, loyally coöperating, sent a battle-cruiser squadron and two carriers in pursuit, but told Washington they had little hope of overtaking the speedy enemy. It was up to the Atlantic Fleet.

They had to win—they *had* to, the Chief of Staff told himself, gritting his teeth. The alternative was too horrible.

But he did wish they had more planes—how many the four enemy ships might carry was of course a matter for conjecture in the American fleet just then, but it was sure to be a lot more than the *Saratoga's* seventy. The Chief of Staff hadn't forgotten what had happened to old battleships on which planes had experimented with two-thousand-pound bombs!

The Admiral, stubbornly refusing to believe that his great battleships could be destroyed by airplane bombs, had resolved to push straight on, using his cruisers and destroyers to find and hold the enemy carriers till he could get them within range of his guns. The *Saratoga's* planes would have to carry on as best they could in the air, outnumbered though they'd be. . . . .

It was a beautiful summery afternoon, with just enough breeze to ruffle the surface, and the Admiral meant to fight an old-style sea-battle. The Chief of Staff was afraid of the outcome. . . . .

A hand gripped his elbow.

"Why the long face, Commander?" asked a cheerful voice.

HE turned to find the captain of the flagship at this side—an old grizzled sea-dog, a "mustang," in fact—in other words, an officer who had started his naval career in the ranks and had risen to the eminence of four stripes by the long road of the petty officer and warrant grades.

"I was wishing we had a few more planes, sir," the Chief of Staff said frankly. "Something to keep their damned bombers away from us."

The Captain nodded.

"Wish so myself," he admitted. "It's beautiful weather for planes now, but the glass is falling a little; if it comes on to blow, God help those fellows!"

Far ahead the eastern sky was suddenly alive with tiny specks—the Chief of Staff raised his binoculars.

Planes! Planes, flying splendidly in formation—planes before which a fringe of American fighting-planes were falling back, outnumbered hopelessly. Before the bombing squadrons a perfect cloud of Red fighting-planes were driving back the *Saratoga's* fighters—underneath, American destroyers raced, starting to make smoke-screens, the flashes of their anti-aircraft guns already beginning to be shrouded in the murk.

Another wireless message—the cruiser *Marblehead* sinking, from a direct hit by a bomb; *Trenton* badly injured—*Concord*

and *Raleigh* were standing by them. *Memphis* and two destroyers were pursuing the Red light forces, which were falling back rapidly to gain the protection of the eight-inch guns of the carriers.

"It's up to us now," the Admiral said grimly. "Our small fry've done all they can for us!"

Under the armored cupolas of the new five-inch anti-aircraft guns, their crews of marines and seamen were resolved to "show the damned Reds." Unfortunately only *Arkansas* and *Wyoming* had these new and powerful guns; the other two battleships still had the old three-inch type. *Saratoga* had twelve of the five-inchers; but the enemy weren't likely to waste time on her; they'd dealt with her fighting planes, and she was no longer a menace. It would be the battleships they'd strike at.

The Chief of Staff could see the Red planes coming nearer and nearer—as the Admiral had observed, it was a matter of minutes now. The airplane had certainly done one thing in naval warfare: it had strictly limited the time which a commander had to prepare to receive attack! A hundred and twenty miles an hour was a lot different from the thirty which was thought a good sea-speed for destroyers.

THE Captain gripped his arm—pointed straight up.

Far, far up in the blue void of heaven—almost undiscernible save to the keen eye of a seaman (or a flyer!)—were five little specks like tiny midges. The Chief of Staff, who had well in mind the battle-plans of the *Saratoga's* skipper, knew instantly what they were. They were the last reserve of American fighting-planes—one last flight, waiting there on high for their moment of sacrifice. A forlorn hope, indeed! Even as he watched them, they swooped down like striking falcons.

Something twinkled for a second as with straining eyes the Chief of Staff followed their progress—was it the fiery trail of a tracer bullet?

In the nearest enemy squadron a great Sikorsky bomber broke formation, side-slipped and went whirling down in flames. Another—yes, by God, and another! Three enemy bombers down in the first moment of attack! Attaboy, reserve flight! The Chief of Staff executed a little gleeful dance-step—but he exulted too soon. Up and up in wide spirals went the Red fighting-planes, twenty or more of them—taken by surprise at first by this attack from aloft, but quickly recovering, storming up to meet it, machine-guns blazing.

The American fighters, bravely disregarding this attack, flung themselves desperately on the bombing squadrons, resolved to do all the damage they could to these before they perished. Hopeless—yet two more Red bombers paid the price before the last of the Americans, turning and twisting, was sent spinning down under the bullets of half-a-dozen enemies. The enemy bombing squadrons closed up the gaps in their formations and came on relentlessly.

They had lost sixteen ships out of forty-five—a splendid tribute to the courage and skill of the outnumbered American fighting-planes; but twenty-nine remained—smoke-rocket signals collected these into two squadrons, each disposed in three flights of four or five ships each, flights which quickly formed "line ahead" and stood on to drop their cargoes of tremendous bombs on the decks of the American battleships!

Behind them the sea was scattered with the wreckage of the American fighters—the *Saratoga's* fighting squadrons had ceased to exist!

And now the sheltering smoke-pall of the destroyers swept suddenly over the American fleet; the destroyer flotilla, sweeping round to windward, was doing all it could to hide its battleships from the swooping menace from the sky.

Through this murk the great ships plowed on.

"If we can only get within range of their carriers!" muttered the Admiral. The *Memphis* was keeping him informed—she still was in touch with the enemy, and he knew that the time was not yet when his turret-guns might speak.

A HUMMING roar from above—a chatter of machine-gun fire—two signalmen on the port wing of the bridge collapsed in blue heaps from which the blood spurted savagely. A five-inch gun, amidships, roared reply—the air was full of the drone of motors!

"Into the conning-tower, sir, for God's sake!" cried the Chief of Staff, seizing the Admiral by the arm. The enemy fighting-planes were swooping low, striving to do what damage they could to exposed personnel with their machine-guns and light bombs. Their special object, of course, was to deal with the crews of the anti-air-

A Red fighting-plane had dropped a light bomb—and killed the Admiral. What fiends' luck these Reds had!

craft guns; but the newly fitted steel cupolas defeated this attempt.

The Admiral shook a stubborn gray head.

"To hell with the conning-tower!" he snapped. "I can't direct a fleet from that tin hen-coop!"

Guns were roaring all along the American column now. So low had the planes swooped that they barely cleared the control-tops of the American ships. They did some damage, but suffered severely for their rashness. Up and away went the survivors —and through the drifting smoke the Chief of Staff saw the advance flight of the bombing squadrons winging into view majestically, far aloft.

Now was the time for the five-inch guns to do their stuff.

Crash! A beautiful burst, on the right level and just ahead of the leading enemy plane. The flight changed direction.

Crash! Crash! Crash! Too late with the salvo—the enemy had dodged. They knew their work, those Red pilots—but the swerve must have thrown their bomb-sights off.

Fast behind them came the second flight; straight overhead it swept, while the anti-aircraft gunners were following the leading group; instantly the *Wyoming's* guns, in accordance with the firing-orders, thundered into action, and their bursts filled the sky with globes of flaming smoke.

And then the flagship shook and shuddered in all her mighty fabric—a hundred yards to port, and fairly abeam, the sea heaved aloft in a tremendous water-spout, and the muffled thunder of the exploding bomb set the whole air a-tremble with ominous vibration.

Again—closer this time! The second flight was making good practice despite the *Wyoming's* gunners.

THERE was a roar from on high, like a sudden, vicious clap of thunder, quite different from the sharp detonations of the bursting shells. Through the smoke the Chief of Staff saw one of the Red bombers dissolve in a cloud of vapor! A hit! The *Wyoming's* marines were doing well!

Wreckage clattered on the decks of the flagship.

Boom!

Even before he turned, the Chief of Staff sensed menace in that sound. A vast cloud of purplish smoke was billowing slowly upward from alongside the *Wyoming;* the great battleship was heeling slowly to starboard, flames playing along her superstructure. The Chief of Staff jumped to the voice-tube leading to the control-top.

"What happened?" he snapped to the observing officer.

"Bomb made a direct hit on *Wyoming,* sir, just to starboard of Number Three turret. Looks bad, sir; but her A. A.'s are still firing." The young ensign's voice trembled with excitement.

The whole sea was leaping under the terrific detonation of bomb after bomb.

A column of smoke sprang aloft like a menacing black pillar from *Wyoming's* forecastle. The Chief of Staff could see the battleship visibly reel under the blow. Another hit!

Boom! That one was close alongside—at once *Wyoming's* list became more pronounced. It was plain that the *Wyoming* had received her death-blow.

The Admiral came across the bridge at the double.

"Signal *Florida* to stand by her," he cried, waving a hand toward the stricken ship. "Start zigzagging with this ship and *Utah!* Damn those bombers—damn them! Reserve speed, Commander! We've got to get those carriers—our only chance—"

Boom! Another bomb had fallen near *Wyoming*—the air overhead seemed to swarm with enemy bombing-planes.

Boom! Boom! Farther astern, these bombs—

Another wireless—*Florida* reported her condensers badly injured; she was unable to make standard speed. Past her through the clearing smoke came the *Utah,* battle-flags a-flutter, her little three-inch A. A. guns blazing gallantly.

A radio-operator leaped to the bridge.

"*Wyoming* says she's sinking, sir!" he cried. He hadn't even waited to write down that fateful message.

"Damn this smoke!" snarled the Admiral. "Can't see a thing, half the time. What's the *Florida* doing?"

"Lowering boats, sir," the Chief of Staff replied, turning from the control-top voice-tube again. "Thank God we didn't set 'em adrift when we cleared for action. Bombers have passed over; they're turning, though—and when they come back for their second run—"

He shuddered, despite himself. The feeling of helplessness, like sheep waiting for the butcher, was horrible. *Wyoming* disabled and sinking; *Florida* injured, standing-by, lowering boats—a perfect target. Half the fleet gone already, you might say—and no doubt *Arkansas* and *Utah* would meet the same fate, though their moment of doom might be delayed a little while the bombers finished off the easier prey first. The smoke-screen had almost all cleared away now; the breeze was rising, beginning to blow steadily from the northeast.

WELL astern, the Chief of Staff saw the Red planes, already wheeling in their aërial countermarch; the *Wyoming* was now visibly settling by the head and had a terrible list; toward her, motor-sailers were already speeding from the *Florida,* while the *Utah* was now next astern to the flagship. Away from the motionless ships the flagship and her consort sped, working up to twenty knots as they went, zigzagging to throw off the aim of the bombers up there in the blue.

"It's hell to abandon those poor devils back there," growled the Admiral, "but if their end can give us time to get closer to the carriers—it's our one hope. Otherwise we're doomed—zigzagging around like a lot of chickens running from a hawk! Battleships—running from those!"

He flung a scornful arm aloft and turned away, his face working.

The Chief of Staff shook his head.

If the Red admiral had an ounce of brains, he'd be steaming away at full speed, keeping clear of the American ships until his bombers completed their destruction.

The breeze was growing stronger—and the old Captain, coming from the chart-house, announced the glass going down fast.

"Look!" he exclaimed, pointing to a dark bank of clouds mounting fast in the northeast. Even as he spoke, the freshening breeze grew chill with the menace of the coming storm.

"No airplane'll ride that nor'easter out,"

the Captain growled, his old eyes glowing fiercely. "They'd better be getting back to their carriers while the getting's good!"

"Here they come!" the Chief of Staff cried. It was true—the Red planes were coming back at full speed, heading straight toward the settling *Wyoming* and the *Florida,* which latter ship, having got what boats were available into the water, was again under way, steaming slowly around her sinking sister as though to protect her as much as she could.

THE airplanes came straight on; across their path cut the destroyer flotilla, suddenly intervening again, the clatter of their light guns filling the air with sound. An hour ago they could have put up an aërial barrage that would have given the Reds trouble; now, with the sea rising and the long slender destroyers pitching and rolling, the planes came on unharmed.

It looked as though the *Florida* was doomed; if she received the concentrated fire of the whole enemy force, the Chief of Staff did not see how she could survive.

But what was this? What was the huge gray shape that came storming up from astern, almost hidden under the pall of her own smoke, while the whole upper air was suddenly aflame with the terrific blast of her shells?

It was the great airplane-carrier *Saratoga,* coming with her twelve splendid five-inch A. A. guns just in the nick of time to the rescue of the threatened battleships! Her gun-crews, trained to a hair; the great bulk of the ship, providing an excellent and steady gun-platform; and the reckless determination of her captain, flinging in his huge ship without a thought of risk: all these things made her intervention, for the moment, decisive.

So fast were her five-inchers firing that the space about her enormous landing-deck seemed fringed with a solid wall of flame; down whirled three of the Red bombers with smoke and fire trailing behind them before the others broke formation and fled pell-mell to the eastward.

The Admiral smiled for the first time since the order for general quarters had been given.

"Signal 'Well done, *Saratoga,*'" he cried. "By God, that was magnificent!"

"New wrinkle, using an aircraft carrier offensively that way," grinned the Chief of Staff. "Nevertheless, they'll circle round and come back," he added. "The *Saratoga's* good, but she can't keep 'em off us forever!"

AS he spoke, the battleship heeled slightly, dipped her enormous bows into the first swell of the coming storm. The captain of the flagship shook his head.

"They'll not be back today," he said. "Look at 'em scuttle for home!"

The whole sky to the north and east was now obscured by rolling clouds, dark and menacing. Against the copper-colored glow that topped these clouds, the officers on the bridge of the *Arkansas* could see the black forms of the retiring bombers. They had done enough for one day; it behooved them to get back to the safety of their carriers while there was time. In the morning—

The Chief of Staff could not think of what must happen in the morning. The *Wyoming* sinking—most of her people had now been taken off by her own boats and *Florida's;* the *Florida* disabled, overcrowded by *Wyoming's* crew; one cruiser gone, another crippled—what could they do save sell their lives as dearly as they might? They could not run—they could not fight back effectively.

The voice of the Admiral broke in on these gloomy meditations.

"I'm going to order *Saratoga* and the cruisers and destroyers home," he said. "They have the heels to get away from these Reds, and they'll be vital to the defense of the city, if any defense can be made. As for the battleships—we'll just have to take our medicine—we'll never be able to fight them off another day, and to keep *Saratoga* with us would be only to sacrifice her uselessly."

"Good God, sir!" cried the Chief of Staff, his blood running cold at the note of despair in the Admiral's voice. "It isn't as bad as that—"

Crash! Cr-r-a-n-g-g-g!

A shattering explosion shook the bridge —bits of flying metal whirred in all directions, ricocheting from stanchions and fittings. To his utter horror, the Chief of Staff saw the Admiral clutch at his throat and fall forward, blood gushing from his mouth. He knelt instantly—the Admiral's blouse was already soaked in blood.

"Done for!" It was horrible.

Instinctively he looked up and saw a Red fighting-plane, the last rear-guard of the squadron that had escorted the bombers, winging her way above the gathering storm back toward her carriers. She had dropped

a light bomb just for luck—and killed the Admiral!

What fiends' luck these Reds had!

Already a messenger had gone flying for the surgeon; they propped the Admiral up, tried to ease the coughing that brought fresh spurts of blood with each paroxysm.

"Through the lungs, poor old Admiral!" the Chief of Staff said.

The Admiral sputtered horribly—he was trying to talk.

The Chief of Staff and the Captain bent low to hear him.

"I—was wrong," the Admiral choked out. "Wrong—no retreat—fight to—last—damn them—"

He choked again on a rush of blood, and, choking, died just as the surgeon reached him.

The Chief of Staff got slowly to his feet and faced the grizzled Captain.

He saluted gravely.

"Rear-Admiral Thornton went down in the *Marblehead,* sir," he said. "You are the senior captain with the fleet. You're in command now!"

Inwardly he was thinking—and wondering! The dead Admiral had been a splendid staff officer, a thoroughly efficient organizer and leader of the military type; the Chief of Staff himself was a product of the new navy, an engineer, a technician, with little of the old salt-water tradition left in him—but the Captain was a sailor, an old sea-dog. What would he do? Could it be that where modern efficiency had failed against the new weapon, old-line seamanship would find a way?

The Chief of Staff permitted himself to doubt it.

AS for the Captain, he suddenly looked years younger. Some of the lines seemed to vanish from his face; he straightened his shoulders a bit. Promotion by selection—which had given the Chief of Staff his three stripes so early in his naval career—had apparently doomed Captain Baxter to live and die in that rank. Almost the senior Captain in the Navy, he was. Not far from retirement for age. They'd never give him an Admiral's stars, those worshipers of efficiency that sat on the selection boards. "Old fogey," they called him; too much salt in his blood to make an Admiral of the new school. Another year or two, and he'd have joined the horde of retired captains who fill the big easy chairs in the lounge of the Army and Navy Club and talk about the service going to the dogs—all the time listening wistfully to the eager chatter of a couple of young lieutenant-commanders who have just been given their first destroyers to command!

And now—Fate had given him his chance! That hopeless seniority, that position in the backwash at the top of the list of captains where the same names appeared in the Navy List year after year, had suddenly turned to his advantage. They were carrying the Admiral's body below. The Captain watched him go sadly enough—yet already his sailor's mind was busy with plans.

It was rapidly growing darker as the sea roughened under the advance blasts of the storm.

"Is *Memphis* still in touch with the enemy carriers?" he demanded.

"Yes sir!" the Chief of Staff answered.

"Good. Her skipper, Yates, is the senior officer with the cruisers and destroyers, isn't he?"

"Yes sir." The Chief of Staff was very formal. He began to have a suspicion of what was coming—and he disapproved.

"Then see that the following order is transmitted to him at once, using secret code E. He is to take under his command all the cruisers and destroyers, and is to organize a succession of torpedo attacks on the enemy's carriers, which must be continued all during the night without cessation, and without regard to weather conditions. At all costs and at any sacrifice, he must get home torpedoes on at least two of the enemy's ships, and on all of them if possible. Got that?"

"Yes sir. But—"

"What is it, Commander?" The tone, quick and decisive, might have been the Admiral's own!

"These Red ships, sir—they're constructed to the latest German design; their new scheme of internal subdivision and triple hulls makes it almost impossible to sink them by torpedo attack. And with this sea coming up, the destroyers—"

"Just a moment, Commander. The Reds may take a lot of sinking—but with two or three waterlogged compartments, they wont be able to steam very fast, especially in heavy weather, will they?"

"No sir. That's true."

"Very well. And wet guncotton bursting against a ship's side can sure bend in a lot of bulkheads. It's surprising the damage a big torpedo will do. These Reds are sup-

posed to be fast—too fast for us. Well, I want 'em where I can find 'em in the morning, for I've a hunch they wont be sending up any planes."

"May I ask, sir, why you think that?" asked the Chief of Staff.

"Just the feel of the weather, Commander. It's blowing hard—and it's going to blow harder! Get that message off as quickly as you can!"

The Chief of Staff saluted.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he assented. Of course it was hopeless; come daylight, they'd be bombed out of the water. But it was an order.

Into the breech the rammers hurled eight hundred fifty pounds of steel. . . . . The guns were ready!

The feel of the weather!

If that wasn't a fine basis on which to prepare orders for a fleet action, on which to risk two great battleships and a swarm of other ships, to say nothing of the lives of four thousand officers and men.

The feel of the weather!

Damn these hide-bound old tars! The Chief of Staff shuddered to the depths of his technical and highly scientific soul.

He wrote out the message and handed it to a lieutenant to be coded. In the gathering darkness, as he turned to watch the *Wyoming,* now far astern, he was just in time to see the last of that great ship. Heavily she lay on her side now, her single cage mast and funnel slanting at a drunken, helpless angle. A searchlight on the *Florida* played over her through the gloom, seeking a sign of any possible survivor still aboard her. The racing seas swept over her empty decks—suddenly a great gray comber curled high above her, crashed down; with a lurch she dipped her bows under, her stern leaped aloft. So she hung for a moment, then with a low rumble of bursting bulkheads she plunged down to her last resting place, twenty-six thousand tons of steel and might destroyed in an hour by a buzzing cloud of man-made dragon-flies! The *Wyoming* was gone.

With that object lesson before him, the Chief of Staff couldn't for the life of him understand why the Captain couldn't see the hopelessness of trying to fight against such fearful weapons as the enemy possessed. He hadn't dared say so—but in his own opinion the only chance was to retreat, to draw the Reds on till the shore airplanes and coast-defense submarines could deal with them. What might happen if these agencies failed to prevent the bombing-planes from taking off, from reaching the rich, helpless, crowded metropolis, he had not stopped to consider.

The *Florida* now had switched off her searchlight and was making after the other ships at the best speed of which she was capable.

But Captain Baxter had a task for her, too.

"Signal *Florida,*" he ordered, "to proceed to location given by *Trenton* and stand by her, releasing *Concord* and *Raleigh* to Captain Yates. Order Yates not to risk his cruisers in torpedo attacks unless the weather gets too heavy for destroyers. He'll

need 'em in the morning for the pursuit. And now for our last card—and perhaps our best one! Where are the V-boats?"

The Chief of Staff jumped. He'd actually forgotten the three big sea-going submarines, V-1, V-2 and V-3, which were accompanying the fleet. They'd had no chance, as yet; the Admiral hadn't ordered them to attack, had been saving them for a real opportunity. Their maximum surface speed of twenty-one knots did not give them much chance of overtaking the speedy enemy—but at night they might do better.

"They're astern somewhere, sir," he told the Captain. "I'll have the radio officer locate 'em."

"Send 'em on to report to Yates," the Captain directed. "Tell him to keep 'em busy all night, attacking the Reds at every opportunity; but to keep four torpedoes in reserve on each ship."

"Aye, aye, sir! That's a splendid thought!" the Chief of Staff exclaimed; and the skipper grinned a little.

Praise from Sir Hubert—

The great flagship was pitching heavily now, diving into the rising waves, shuddering upward with tons of water pouring off her forecastle and plunging again into the next great rolling swell. The wind had risen almost to the force of a gale; behind them the Chief of Staff could just make out the *Utah* keeping station splendidly, and still farther astern a gray blotch was *Saratoga,* now third ship in the column. *Florida* was lost in the gloom, though her radio acknowledged the Captain's order, and stated that she was proceeding on duty assigned at twelve knots, the best speed of which she was capable since receiving the injury to her condensers.

A YOUNG lieutenant-commander, gunnery officer of the *Arkansas,* came up on the bridge. The Captain grinned at him.

"Think your turret-crews can hit the Reds in this weather, Mr. Leighton, if I put you within range of 'em?" he asked.

The gunnery officer laughed—a short, confident laugh.

"Try them, sir—just try 'em!" he replied. He'd trained those turret crews himself—he knew what they could do!

All that night the great gray ships held their course, directed by the continual radio signals of the *Memphis,* though at first their pursuit seemed hopeless. The enemy had stood away southward, running before the storm; the American ships, altering course to southeast, had wind and sea abeam, and rolled terrifically as they plunged on in chase.

BUT if the battleships made heavy weather of it, their discomfort was as nothing to that of the destroyers. Division after division, these acknowledged Captain Yates' orders and flung themselves through the darkness and the howling gale after the enemy. Pitching, rolling, bucking—justifying to the full their title of "Bronchos of the Sea"—they sped on their deadly mission. The *Bainbridge* of Division Nine was the first to sight the enemy—far ahead, a single light low down near the surface of the sea, now hidden, now flashing again into view—undoubtedly the stern-light of a warship, supposedly visible only to the ship immediately following.

The *Bainbridge* instantly announced her discovery by radio, and while she tore on in pursuit, the other four boats of her division hard at her heels, the squadron leader *Dallas* was frantically summoning other laboring divisions to their prey.

Now the torpedo crews of Division Nine were working their way aft along streaming decks, clinging grimly to life-lines as they went. The great triple torpedo-tubes were cast loose; gunners' mates climbed into their seats, shipped torpedo-directors, hung on for dear life as the thunderous seas swept across the narrow decks. At the range-finder atop the *Bainbridge's* charthouse, a cursing quartermaster with both legs braced apart and one arm round a stanchion, strove to pierce the gloom, banging his head every now and again against the eye-piece of his instrument as the ship "bucked."

The light was closer—suddenly it was very close! The young skipper of the *Bainbridge* saw a darker shape in the darkness ahead, changed his course two points to starboard, bringing the sea on his quarter, increased speed and forged slowly past the laboring mass now made out more clearly against the sky—black against gray.

"The enemy, sir!" spoke the quartermaster at the range-finder into his voice tube; the young officer had already arrived at that conclusion—a big ship, with a strangely lop-sided funnel and mast, an aircraft carrier if ever he saw one!

"Ready, Mr. Scanlon?"

"Ready, sir!" came the prompt voice of the torpedo-officer from amidships, where he hung on to the life-line with one hand.

"Fire when you're on!"

Almost instantly came the "thud-thud-thud" of the torpedoes of Number Two tube, followed by those of Number Four—a breathless pause, and suddenly the night was rent by a baleful flash, a thunderous roar—another and another!

Guns flashed in answer, and a shell screamed wickedly overhead—the *Bainbridge's* skipper laughed as he changed course again to clear the way for his following division.

"Three torpedo hits on a Red ship!" was his triumphant radio to the *Dallas*.

Other destroyers were rushing in now, and the roar of gunfire filled the night as they found and attacked the remaining ships of the Red squadron; the *Barry* was hit by a shell and foundered almost immediately, and the *Dallas*, bringing the squadron commander to take charge of the action, was blown to bits by a concentrated salvo of eight-inch guns from the ship the *Bainbridge* had torpedoed. All round the four enemy ships danced the white swords of searchlights, groping through the night for the slender little destroyers that ran in, struck and fled so swiftly into the darkness.

But the searchlights served to betray the carriers' position, too; and not only to the destroyers. The big fleet submarines, slipping up from astern as the enemy speed lessened, selected the ship farthest to the rear, whose searchlights were working busily now.

Down they dived and let her have two torpedoes apiece, one after the other.

The Chief of Staff, pacing sleeplessly the bridge of the plunging, wallowing *Arkansas*, gave a yell of delight as he snatched the message from the radio-operator's hand.

"Look here, sir!" he cried. "The *Bainbridge* torpedoed one of the enemy; she fell astern; the V-boats found her, and by God!—they fired so many torpedoes into her that she sank!"

"That's one of 'em," the Captain said grimly. "How about the rest?"

"*Dallas* is gone, but division commanders reporting to *Memphis* say that two of the Reds have been hit by torpedoes and are losing speed; the other is standing by 'em—they've driven off the enemy small craft, and are continuing the attack—but the sea's getting too heavy for 'em—"

"Call off the dogs—we'll be losing some of our destroyers for nothing," the Captain answered. "They've done enough—how far are we away now?"

"Not over fifteen knots," was the joyful answer, "and coming up on the enemy fast! We should be well in sight of them at daybreak!"

And at daybreak the control officers aloft in the reeling top of the flagship were straining their eyes through the mist and spray to catch their first sight of the enemy. The eastern sky went from black to gray, a gray which lightened fast—dark shapes, a trail of smoke—the Reds!

Far to the south the American light cruisers signaled their position; they were shepherding the exhausted destroyers away from the enemy, clear of the death that was now to speak in thunderous tongues.

Where were the Red bombing-planes?

They tried to bring them up from below—they whirled along the decks, slipped sideways into the sea as the ships rolled. One or two gained the air only to be flung hither and thither by the gale—not a plane was able to take off successfully. The sea-god was in the ascendant—the air-god cowered, helpless before the bitter menace of the storm!

"Eighteen thousand yards!" cried a control officer on the *Arkansas*. In her two forward turrets eager sight-setters sang out gleeful answer and set the range. Up from below leaped the shell-cars—the breech-blocks swung back, and into the breech of each gun the rammers hurled eight hundred and fifty pounds of steel. Behind the shells went the powder-bags—the breeches were slammed shut. Before the eyes of the officer at the firing-director little lights gleamed out. The guns were ready.

With bated breath the turret-crews waited in their electric-lighted steel prisons.

SLOWLY the pitiless director-telescope up there in the control-top followed the dark blotch of the distant enemy—the rearmost ship, the nearest and best target. The hand of the gunnery officer rested on the firing key—the great turrets below swung slowly round.

The cross-hairs were fairly "on"! He pressed the key as the ship paused at the top of her roll—

The rolling thunder of the two forward guns answered—twin levin-bolts of flame sprang from their lean muzzles, great clouds of smoke and gas rolled upward.

Far, far away, beyond the distant silhouettes of the enemy, two barely discernible waterspouts sprang skyward. The spotting officers saw them.

"Seventeen thousand five hundred," they droned.

And almost instantly Number Two turret roared its answer to that word.

This time the waterspouts were short of the flying enemy ship.

Again the range was corrected.

Number One Turret, reloaded, fired—

"Hit!" yelled an exultant spotting officer; instantly the course was changed, and together the six guns of Numbers One, Two and Three turrets rolled out a tremendous salvo. On that gray horizon a brilliant splash of flame burst out, dissolved into flying meteors, while the rumble of a distant explosion came to them across the heaving seas as an echo of the voice of their own guns.

"God!" muttered the Chief of Staff, awed. "She must have been loaded to the gunwale with bombs!"

"That's two!" tallied the implacable Captain. "We'll charge that fellow off for the poor old *Wyoming!*"

Already that merciless, cold eyepiece of the firing-director was following the next enemy ship, which was evidently not making very much speed.

Utah, swinging out on the flagship's quarter, had fired two ranging shots—the *Arkansas* was preparing to fire, when a radio message from Captain Yates on the *Memphis* reached Captain Baxter.

"Cease firing," he barked, as he read it, "cease firing! Poor devils, they've had enough! The other two Reds have hauled down their flags and radioed the *Memphis* that they surrender! One of 'em's just been torpedoed again by the V-boats, and the *Utah's* first shells didn't miss her twenty feet!"

The Chief of Staff heaved a sigh of heartfelt relief. He tingled with joy.

"Congratulations, sir!" he cried to Captain Baxter. "You've won a great victory! Won it after we were licked, too!"

The Captain smiled happily.

"Thanks, Commander!" he said. "Those damned airplanes are the very devil when things are right for 'em—but for sea-fighting, you've got to have weapons you can use in all weathers!"

And he glanced lovingly down at the long tubes of the flagship's twelve-inch guns, from whose muzzles smoke was still faintly curling.

The Chief of Staff followed his glance, and swallowed hard—but he nodded.

"Yes, sir!" he assented. "You're right!"

The Assegai

By BERTRAM ATKEY

A specially interesting adventure of those two jovial companions in crime and gourmandizing known as the Easy Street Experts.

Illustrated by
Frank Hoban

IT is practically certain that neither of those two portly old rascals The Honorable John Brass and his partner Colonel Clumber would ever have heard of that dangerous, pink-faced, plus-foured party who called himself Mr. Guy Gaunte had it not chanced that on the evening they made his acquaintance they happened to have in the secret safe installed at Purdston Old Place (their secluded country-house on the Surrey-Hants border) about fifteen thousand pounds' worth of very high-class jewels. If one had been so vulgarly inquisitive, so coarsely tactless as to ask whose jewels these were they would have replied urbanely, if laconically, "Ours."

The two adventurers were sitting over a glass or two-or-three of the rare old *liqueur* brandy with which it was their custom to "steady" their natural digestions after what they regarded as a natural dinner and, in his friendly way, the Honorable John was warning his partner that unless he shortly began to diet himself in no uncertain fashion he would almost inevitably become so bulksome that he would find his feet completely inadequate to the task of supporting him in an upright position on the face of the earth.

"They will flatten on you, Squire—your arches will go and you'll get duck-footed. I've known cases of it. It's awkward for you. But I don't see what else you can do about it but grade down on your meals. You like good food—I know it. So do I—I admit it,' said Mr. Brass comfortably

Something flashed past the Colonel's neck—ripping a slash along his coat collar—and slammed into the paneling with a thud.

from behind his expensive cigar. "I like it good, I like a lot of it and I like it often. But I can carry my food better than you, Squire. What I eat—and I eat hearty, always shall—turns to pure bone, first-rate sinew and high-class brains with me. It's the natural way I am, and I'm glad of it. What I eat does me good, whereas what you eat turns to pure fat. It's nothing to be ashamed of—though I'll say honestly that I'm mighty glad it's not that way with me. Yes—pure fat. Well, say, plain fat. It's not for me to criticize the way you have unfortunately been coating up with it the last year or two—"

He broke off, almost disconcerted by the lurid glare which his simmering partner suddenly fixed on him.

"Hey, what d'ye mean, coating up? D'ye think you're talking about some kind of a pig—or an agricultural show bullock or something?" bawled the Colonel furiously.

The Honorable John stared, evidently amazed at the outburst.

"What's the matter? What are you shouting that way for? Anybody would think I was trying to hurt your feelings! You ought to know by this time that I would not hurt anybody's feelings, a man of my sensitive nature and natural delicacy. I merely observed, with thoroughly good intentions and a certain amount of genuine, friendly anxiety that it would scare *me* if I were coating up with plain fat the way you are—"

"Well, transfer your anxiety to yourself," snarled Colonel Clumber. "You say your food turns into brain! Great Scott, if it did that you'd need a skull the size of a five-thousand-gallon circular cistern to hold the brains that would result—but haven't! Man, can't you see things as other human beings see 'em? Stand beside a mirror with me any day you like and if you can't see the plain fact that I have hollows where you've got humps; that—"

But here something came humming in out of the dusk through the open window, flashed past the back of the Colonel's neck, ripping a slash along his coat collar as clean as a knife-cut, and slammed itself into the paneling on the other side of the room with a thud that sounded rather like a great draft horse landing an impatient kick against the side of a wooden barn.

MR. BRASS glanced at it.

The thing was an assegai — the broad-bladed spear which the gentle Zulu formerly was accustomed to use for a variety of purposes such as destroying his enemies, skinning elephants, shaving, or smacking his wife, all according to his taste and fancy and the needs of the moment. The weapon was standing out from the tough oak as stiffly as if it were a long steel spike belted into the wood with a sledge-hammer.

The Honorable John rose, and moving very much more swiftly than one would

have expected a man of his great bulk to do, snapped up an electric switch.

Through the black darkness of the room his voice came soothingly.

"Duck, you damn' fool, duck! And put out that cigar. They wont miss that fat carcass of yours twice in succession!"

That, of course, was pure common-sense. But the mulish Colonel Clumber chose to take it differently from the way his partner meant it.

"Carcass! What d'ye mean, carcass?" he snarled through the darkness. "Duck! *Me* duck! Duck be damned! I'll ask you to have the decency to speak to me in a very dif—"

But there the slam of a sharply closed window and the rattle of curtain rings half-drowned his heart-felt voice.

Mr. Brass waited a second, then switched on the light again.

"They could spear you in at one ear and out at the other while you were discussing the odds, old man," he said, more in sorrow than in anger, crossed the room and dragged the completely ugly weapon out of the paneling.

He peered at it, handling it with great care.

"May be poisoned—but it's such a walloping big blade that I fancy the owner would build on the blade doing its job without assistance," he muttered, and laid it carefully on the table. "I guess that little affair would have let daylight through your brains—if possible—if it had been a trifle better aimed!"

The Colonel glared at it, fingering the cut along the collar of his dinner jacket.

"Who threw that?" he growled.

Mr. Brass smiled.

"You're late with the cross-examination, Colonel," he responded good-humoredly. "The merchant who hove that thing left here some time ago—if I am any kind of a judge!"

His heavy brows suddenly knitted as he stared down at the assegai, and he pressed the bell.

Instantly and silently there appeared the Honorable John's private slave Sing, the Chinaman whom, many years before, he had purchased for the very respectable sum of five shillings—from a tired homeward-bound policeman who did not at all desire the job of carting to the hospital a semi-dead Chinese whom he had resurrected from the end of a dark alley. Far more years ago than Mr. Brass now cared to figure about he had successfully trained Sing to be a perfect one-man-power machine. Sing was a faultless valet, a fine cook, a first-class motor-driver, and, when called upon, he could swing, among other things, a mitt that made chloroform, anæsthetically speaking, look slow and unreliable.

"Just bring me in those two assegais that are hanging up in the hall with our bouquet of plain and fancy snickersnees, will you, my lad," commanded the Honorable John.

SING departed—to return a second or two later, saying that there were no assegais now hanging among the trophy of blades decorating the hall.

"Humph!" said Mr. Brass, his hard eyes a trifle flintier than usual. "That's so, is it? Two assegais abstracted from that collection! Hah!"

He was fingering the blade of the one which had been so very abruptly returned to them through the window.

"How were the blades of the spears, Sing? Sharp, would you say? Or blunt—like those show swords and things you see hanging on folks' walls? Think, now—use your brains. It's important! Would they cut?"

Sing shook his head in a decided negative.

"Huh! Feel the edge of that, will you, Colonel." Mr. Brass passed the assegai to his glowering partner. "Man, it could all but cut your head off! Mine too!"

The Colonel, gingerly scraping a cautious thumb along the edge, agreed, with every symptom of disgust.

"Well, what are you going to do about it? You're a bit of a superman at this stuff, according to your own version of yourself, so I assume you'll be taking some steps in the matter," he demanded.

"Yes, I'll be taking some steps," said Mr. Brass and, lifting his eyes from the polished blade, he studied Sing pensively.

"I may be wrong," he said, "though I very rarely am; I may be wrong, but I'm feeling pretty certain that if anybody had photographed this Zulu affair for finger-prints a few minutes ago—before we began to paw it about, Colonel, they'd have got a few first-class specimens of Sing's prints, left there when he cleaned and polished it last. The man who threw it would wear gloves!"

"Well, what of it?" demanded the Colonel.

The Honorable John beamed indulgently on his partner.

"Yes, we're a lucky pair," said Mr. Brass; and without warning he swung an arm like the fore-paw of a grizzly to Guy's jaw.

"There's more in this than meets your eye, Colonel," he chuckled.

Then he took an old brandy, and instructing Sing to listen very carefully, proceeded to explain his "theory."

"With any luck at all the man who threw this would have killed you instantly! Make no mistake about that! Figure it to yourself, if you can. Picture yourself falling forward across the table with half the blade of that thing embedded under your ear. Picture me, now, naturally getting up and coming to your aid—stooping over you—and receiving the other assegai for myself. They'd have got us both, practically without noise. Well, there we are—dead over our dinner-table! But what's Sing doing all the time, you might be asking yourself. Well, as I see it, Sing would soon have been helpless somewhere in the kitchen or cellar. Not hurt—but a prisoner—locked in, maybe, behind wedged doors. I judge they—the folk behind the spears—didn't want Sing hurt at all.

"Well, there *we* are, dead as plucked spring chickens, and Sing shut up. The gentlemen with the gloves on, having attended to Sing, then take what they're after, and quit for good. Sing, being a capable sort of cock, soon releases himself—they'd have made it easy—comes snooping around, finds us, drags out the assegais, assures himself there's nothing to be done for us, looks around for a few minutes to see what can be done about catching the murderers, and by the time he's decided to telephone for the police (none of us, mind, are ever in what you might term a frantic hurry to call 'Police! Police!') he's too late. For, unless I miss my guess, somebody else would already have telephoned the police and they would be here. If Sing hung around too long, fussing and fretting over me,—as he more than likely would,—it's pretty nearly certain that the police would have found him standing over us, quite likely with a very dirty assegai in his hand, or if not in his hand, then with two stained spears lying on the floor—both well finger-marked by Sing. There would be blood on his clothes—our friends with the gloves would have seen to that—and so, on the whole, friend Sing would have found himself in a position so devilish awkward and with such a feeble explanation that I figure he would only get out of it through a trapdoor operated by a professional hangman.

"He might have got off with twenty years. It would depend on what they found in his box—no doubt the lad has got some queer bits and pieces, picked up here and there, in his box. And the folk who threw these things would have vanished into thin air without leaving a trace; and *with* their plunder."

Mr. Brass refilled his glass, doubtless feeling it was due to him.

But Colonel Clumber merely looked stubbornly unconvinced.

"It looks to me as if you ought to have been one of those fiction fakers," he grumbled. "I don't see where you get it all from, anyway. These mystery guys with the gloves on—what would they be after—"

The Honorable John stared.

"*You* ask a question like that?" he said. "Why you poor old quarter-wit, what is there in our little safe at this moment?"

Colonel Clumber scowled—then understood and nodded reluctantly.

THE Colonel reflected.

"Huh! Well, what are you going to do about it?" he demanded at last. "What does it all convey to you, anyway?"

The Honorable John's face was serious as he replied without hesitation that it conveyed so much to him that it gave him a pain in his note-wallet.

"It means that somebody knows we have got that grand little collection of jewels—and means to get them for himself. And there's more than one of 'em—maybe a whole gang. Their little effort mis-timed tonight, certainly—but it was almighty instructive. For it shows us plain enough that, whoever they are, they would have just about as much hesitation in blotting us off the scroll of life as three black beetles. Dangerous, desperate, crafty crowd, evidently. Must look into it."

"How could they tell we have any jewels here? Everybody likely to know that the Vandermonde jewels have—um—changed hands, is in jail—except, of course, old Whitney Vandermonde and his niece Patricia, who both believe the things were stolen by the gang we had the pleasure of mopping up and landing in jail. And they're both back in America again—so glad that Patricia is still alive and safe, thanks to us, that they are not likely to bother us, the men who saved Patricia's life, about any missing jewels—a small thing to a multi-millionaire the size of old Vandermonde, compared with Patricia's life, anyway. So how could these assegai guys know about the jewels?"

Mr. Brass laughed.

"Well, it's staring you in the face, Squire—but as you don't seem to notice it I'll mention that evidently some of that jailed gang have got word out to a gang not yet jailed. It seems pretty obvious—that! However—"

He broke off as Sing entered silently; he came across to the Honorable John and laid on the table at his owner-driver's elbow a small red woolly tassel—one of those decorations which many golfers, for unknown but probably excellent reasons, wear at the tops of their stockings nestling, so to speak, like modest scarlet violets of the dell, in the shadow of their plus-fours. To the tassel he added a shred or two of fawn-colored cloth.

Mr. Brass brightened up.

"Where d'ye find these things, Sing?"

Sing explained briefly that he had gone out to see if anything was wrong with Corporal, the house-dog—that heavily built mixture of boar-hound, bloodhound and Airedale which the Honorable John, some years before, had first encountered in a gipsy camp and, charmed with his air of sheer truculence, had bought forthwith.

He was a silent beast, a magnificent guard-dog, and he had a finer power of scent than most pure-bred bloodhounds. He rarely barked—but he bit, enthusiastically if silently, at any stranger that passed his way at night.

Sing had found the tassel near Corporal's food dish.

"Evidently one of our callers was a bit of a golfer," said Mr. Brass, studying the tassel. "Wore the raiment anyway. He must have been prowling round—got too near Corp and pretty nearly had his plus-fours pulled off his body. Don't see that this helps us much, Sing. However, we—"

A trill of sound from the electric bell checked him. He jerked his head toward the front door and Sing departed, to return a few minutes later with the caller—a tall, fat, pale-faced, puffy-cheeked, extraordinarily young-looking person with a permanent bright pink flush, ash-blonde hair and a peculiar falsetto voice, who introduced himself as Mr. Guy Gaunte.

HIS mouth was red and tiny, like a pretty girl's, and his eyes were pale but pinkish like a pretty ferret's.

And his laugh was like a side-slip in C alt.

The dour Colonel took a look at him and turned to the decanter; but kindly, tolerant old Mr. Brass shook him warmly by the hand and spoke civilly to him.

But, then, only that hawk-eyed old rascal had noted instantly that Mr. Gaunte's left plus-four was slightly frayed at the knee and that while the own brother to the scarlet tassel in Mr. Brass' pocket was correctly

The Honorable John's eyes went hard at sight of that flask. "I don't know what's in it," he said; "but it's no health tonic!"

in position just under Mr. Gaunte's right knee, the left tassel was missing!

"I'm very sorry to come rushing in like this—but my old car has broken down close by," volunteered Mr. Gaunte. "My driver says the make-and-break spring has broken, and as a forlorn hope I've run back to ask if by a hundred-to-one chance, you good Samaritans might have a spare to lend me!"

The Honorable John released the hand which he had shaken steadily throughout this extraordinary speech.

"A spare make-and-break spring?" he said. "No doubt but what we can find you a small matter of that kind. Unless I'm very much mistaken there's a spare pair of 'em in this drawer. Is your chauffeur here?"

"He's outside now."

"That's good!" He turned to Colonel Clumber. "You put those small magneto spares in here, didn't you?" he asked.

The Colonel, watching his partner's face, rose and went over.

"I did—they're in the left-hand corner," he said.

"Well, that's extraordinarily lucky," began Mr. Gaunte as, with his hands in his pockets, he loafed across to Mr. Brass who was reaching for the drawer.

"Yes—we're a lucky pair," said that sportsman; and absolutely without warning, he swung an arm like the forepaw of a grizzly to Guy's jaw.

The great fist connected with a thud as of a slammed door, and Mr. Gaunte went down like a man who has been struck by lightning, thunder and an unpleasant idea.

"Look out, Sing!" shouted the Honorable John, grabbed two pistols from the "motor spares" drawer, passed one to the Colonel and edged across the hall towards the door.

"Watch that man, Sing," he said, deliberately fired into the dark through the open front door, and a second later flung that heavy door to with a crash.

"There's too much of this rough stuff going on to please me," he said. "See that all the ground-floor curtains and blinds are drawn and lights out except in here, Sing —and be quick about it! Hold the man down, Squire," he added to the Colonel, "while I see what he carries in his pockets."

Mr. Gaunte wriggled once, then, realizing that the massive hand at his throat was capable of squashing his windpipe without much effort, lay still, while Mr. Brass, with conspicuous deftness, searched him.

IT was quite a little heap of salvage that he collected out of his victim's clothes.

There was a pistol of a very modern, efficient and expensive make, a peculiar example of the gentle daggermaker's craft—a singular, slightly curved steel blade, appallingly sharp, that would either cut like a razor or stab like a needle; there was a distinctly nasty-looking flask covered with a strong netting of steel wire and secured with a heavy, metal screw-stopper.

The Honorable John's eyes went hard at sight of that flask.

"I don't know what's in it," he said. "But it's no health tonic! Handle it as if it were hot, Squire!"

There was a note-case, bulging with perfectly good money, a few letters, a combined card- and cigarette-case, and some harmless oddments of that kind.

Mr. Brass explored the card-case.

Every card in it bore either the following inscription:

CAPTAIN FITZROY MOORMARK, D. S. O.
Metropole Mansions, London, W.

or this—

The Regency Private Enquiry Agency
299 Regent St., London.
Mr. Guy Gaunte.

Mr. Brass studied the cards carefully, looked over the rest of his loot, then turned to his partner.

"He can get up—but keep a sharp eye to him, Colonel, when he's up. For I mistrust him. I mistrust him like hell!"

With a rather groggy air of nonchalance the pink person arose—aided considerably by the Colonel's grip on the front part of his neck. Colonel Clumber, like lots of us, was always angry with things and folk he did not understand.

"This is indeed a hospitable reception," said Guy, smiling rather lopsidedly. "Do you know, I really believe you have loosened every tooth in my head."

Mr. Brass returned the smile.

"I'm sorry about that, maybe," he responded, genially. "They'll set in solid enough after a bit—you've got youth in your favor. Take a seat. No—better warn off your pal or pals outside first. Then you can take a drink and tell us who you are and why you have come here acting rough like this."

THE captive stared at Mr. Brass for a few seconds. He still smiled and his eyes remained friendly. In spite of his slightly fatuous manner he was quite evidently a person with iron self-control.

"Oh, quite, quite," he said. "As you wish. There has obviously been a mistake."

Mr. Brass whispered something to Sing who silently disappeared as Gaunte moved across the room, drew back the curtains, and threw up the window.

Two people were standing outside. The captive—with Mr. Brass markedly behind him—spoke quietly to them.

"There's been a mistake, dearest Sylvia. I owe these good gentlemen an explanation and an apology. Will you go back to the car with Hollis and wait for me? I will join you very soon."

The Honorable John and his partner were looking with keen interest at the lady addressed. She was plainly visible in the light pouring out from the well-lit room and she was undeniably attractive in a dark, brilliant Spanish sort of way. She was what Mr. Brass had frequently stated to be "just about my style"—a fine, upstanding figure of a woman. Her companion was obviously a chauffeur.

"Pardon me," said the Honorable John. "It is not our custom to shoo ladies or chauffeurs away from our door at this hour of the night. If there has been a mistake maybe the lady can help put it right. I hope, Madame—er—Sylvia will join us over some refreshment, the explanation and the apology."

The lady flashed him a truly brilliant smile.

"Why, that is too charming of you," she said. "Do I enter through the window?"

"Nunno," exclaimed Mr. Brass hastily, and turned to the prisoner.

"Who is the lady, my friend?" he inquired.

"My cousin—and fiancée—Miss Sylvia Noreen Chetsworth," said Gaunte.

"Humph! A very attractive girl," said the Honorable John. "Is she armed?"

The pink-faced one shrugged.

"Oh, probably—a small automatic or so," he said indifferently.

Mr. Brass grinned.

"I see—just ordinary everyday ladies' bric-a-brac—keeps her little guns with her lipstick and powderpuff, hey?" he said satirically. "Just ask her and the chauffeur to hand their battery over while we enjoy our little friendly talk with you. You see, those big Brownings of ours are too heavy to keep comfortably trained on you all the time we're talking."

"Why certainly—a pleasure, I assure you," Gaunte agreed.

NEITHER the lady nor the chauffeur made any objection to so reasonable a proposal. They passed in to the hand which Mr. Brass extended from behind Mr. Gaunte no fewer than four rather efficient-looking automatics of varying calibers. When these were unloaded and thrown out into the pitch-black shrubbery, Mr. Brass, leaving Gaunte well and truly covered by his partner, admitted them. The girl was

arrayed in a very trim-looking suit that was neither a riding-suit nor a motor-cyclist's kit but a smart blend of both. Very natty she looked in her breeches and shapely stockings, and her face, framed in a rather chic motor-cyclist's helmet of leather, was quite extraordinarily charming.

The chauffeur looked like—a chauffeur.

"I am sure you wont feel mortally offended, my dear hosts, if I say that you have a *most* original way of responding to a request for motor first-aid," she observed.

The Honorable John chuckled.

"That will be all right, my dear," he said. "But we've had a little trouble here tonight—and we were under the impression that you three had returned to complete your program of blotting us out with the decorations off our own wall—the assegais!" he explained.

The blank stares with which this simple inquiry was received would almost have satisfied the astute old rascal who made it—if he had not had the little scarlet tassel in his pocket. He questioned them carefully and patiently in his friendly conversational way for some minutes, but could glean nothing remotely resembling an admission that they had ever heard of such things as assegais in the whole of their lives.

"You know nothing about that, I see," said the old adventurer. "Let it go. Why worry about trifles, anyway? What's an assegai or two, after all? But what's your name, friend? Are you Guy Gaunte as well as Fitzroy Moormark—both or neither? And if so, why?"

RATHER stiffly the pink youth smiled, while fingering his swelling jaw.

"Oh, Guy Gaunte, of course," he said. "Those other cards are just business cards. Sylvia and I are the Regency Private Enquiry Agency. I've half a dozen other names—on cards—for that matter. One needs them in the private inquiry business, you know."

Mr. Brass nodded, with some interest.

"Yes, I know. How's business?"

"Oh, not too good—is it, Sylvia?"

"It's utterly vile—the wretched office is eating away all our stupid little capital," declared Sylvia.

The Honorable John wondered why, in that case, she wore a diamond engagement ring that, if a diamond, was worth a small fortune, also why they traveled in such an expensive model of a car as that for which they had needed the spring.

"But why the battery, the dagger and the armored scent-bottle?"

"Surely that's quite obvious," said Mr. Gaunte, with great readiness. "We are after a blackmailer—a bad, dangerous brute who carries bombs. He is perfectly prepared to blow himself to bits before he is arrested—together, of course, with those who try to arrest him. In the ordinary way our agency would give him a severe miss in baulk—but times are hard and we have had a really huge reward offered us, privately, by a wealthy victim—if we can nail him."

MR. GAUNTE grinned a semi-dislocated grin.

"If we can contrive to get that bottle opened quietly in any room in which the blackguard is sitting he'll doze off like a butterfly in a cyanide bottle—and wake up in jail. There's an odorless gas in that bottle, my friend, that would put a church congregation to sleep more quickly than the Vicar himself. Harmless, swift, efficient—very good gas. It cost us nearly eighty pounds, that gas."

"Where is this dangerous man?" asked the Honorable John.

"Not five miles from here," said Gaunte, and straightened up. "Look here, gentlemen," he said eagerly, "would you care to accompany us? It's a risky business—but I'll pay you a quarter of the reward, if we get him, and—" he laughed, "and, dash it, I'll forgive you that one on the jaw. What do you say?"

It sounded as interesting as genuine. It was a really clever bluff.

But Mr. Brass had not forgotten that little red tassel.

He shook his head.

"Nunno—not at our age," he said, half regretfully. "Once upon a time we'd have sooner gone rake-helling around at night than eat! But not now. No."

Under protection of Colonel Clumber's trained battery he supplied them with refreshments.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You must fight your own battles as we've got to fight ours. But we'll wish you luck—you deserve it perhaps."

He smiled benignly upon them. . . . .

Then the party proceeded to accept with some avidity the Honorable John's invitation to be on their way. In reply to a reminder about the make-and-break spring the chauffeur declared blandly that

he had just remembered there was a spare one tucked away in an old spark-plug box in a corner of the tool-case.

So that was all right.

The trio left without further reference to their sequestrated arms. "Evidently in a greater hurry than they seem," observed Mr. Brass dryly to the Colonel, who had been regarding the termination of the affair with black disapproval.

"Well, I suppose you know what you're driving at," answered the junior partner. "But I'll say here and now that *I* don't and never shall. There's not a shadow of doubt in my mind that they were the people who slung those assegais in at us, and when their plan went wrong waited a bit, then came back planning to finish us off the best way they could, then to collect the jewelry and quit, leaving us cold. It doesn't take three armed folk to call for the loan of a magneto spring," he concluded as Sing entered, smiling yellowly.

"Correct," beamed Mr. Brass.

"Then why let 'em go scot free?"

"What else was there to do? Murder 'em? Or send for the police? You want to use your brains when you're dealing with sharks like these, Squire. It's good enough for us to know that they know we've got something worth having here—the jewels. We'll have to get them turned into cash."

He turned to Sing. "Well, Sing, did you look over the car?"

"Two cars, master! No spling breakee—all good."

The Chink handed over a dispatch-case.

"Findee—fetchee," he said laconically.

Mr. Brass took the case.

"One of the best little retrievers I ever owned, aint you, Sing?" he said. "Go on with your report."

THE yellow all-rounder's report was soon finished. In compliance with his astute old master's whispered order he had quietly slid up the road to take a look at the car and, generally, to see whatever might be visible. He had found two cars waiting by the roadside. With his customary deftness he had examined the make-and-break springs of both magnetos and found nothing wrong with either. He had noted the makes, colors, tires and numbers of both, and he had neatly but effectively "swiped" the dispatch-case, which he found packed away in one of the roomy pockets, together with several other small loose goods of a character which, while valueless to his master, appealed to his simple Chinese nature.

Then he had retired into the shadows in which he was so much at home, had witnessed the hurried departure of the trio, and had returned to the house.

The Honorable John warmly approved the action of his retainer and, forcing the lock of the case, proceeded to examine the contents.

"I don't suppose you've found us a fortune, my lad," he said, "for that class of party isn't in the habit of leaving a fortune in their cars while they pop off for a few seconds to commit a little murder or so. But we'll just see what—"

He ceased abruptly, his face hardening as he concentrated on the papers with which the case was filled.

"Here—take a look at this, Colonel!"

They went through the collection like a lawyer going through a deed containing a valuable flaw. . . . .

Presently Mr. Brass poured himself a cheerful-sized drink, lit a cigar and, beaming in every direction, observed to Sing:

"Well, my lad, I shouldn't be surprised if you've made a shilling or two for yourself this evening; might run to as much as a couple of pounds. We'll see about that."

He turned to his partner.

"You see what Old Reliable has found and brought into the house, Colonel? At any rate *I* do. It's the whole of the documents on which Gaunte & Co. have been blackmailing Lord Callantyre. And that letter there—the one on the blue paper—explains the whole evening's work to me."

"Huh! I'm glad of that," grunted the Colonel. "It's fairly obvious! Let's hear your idea."

But Mr. Brass was reaching for the telephone.

"Presently," he said, and put in his call.

It was to Callantyre Hall—one of the big show country-houses of the district—about five miles away.

He talked into the instrument for a few moments, then hung up, smiling.

"Get out the big car, Sing, as quick as you can slither yourself down to the garage," he commanded.

Sing slithered.

ABOUT twenty minutes later the adventurers were facing, in a magnificent library, that almost unnecessarily wealthy financier, Lord Callantyre—a rather handsome though slightly worn man of perhaps

fifty-five. He was in a dressing-gown and, on the whole, looked as if he should be in the place he had just left—bed.

With his usual hearty aplomb Mr. Brass briefly introduced himself and partner and passed Lord Callantyre the dispatch-case.

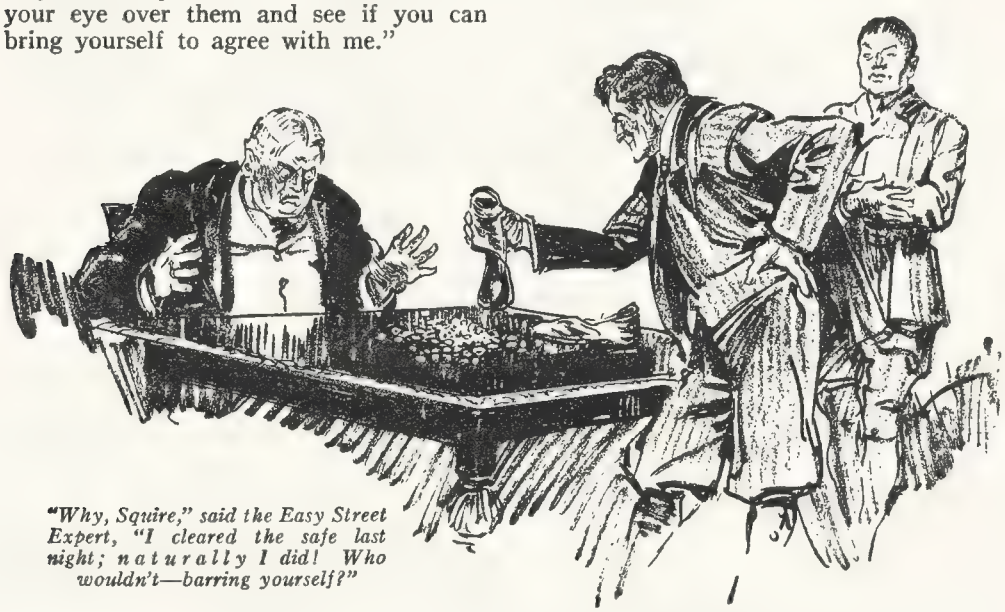
"I'm not a believer in turning a tired man out of his bed—nor a hungry man away from his dinner, Lord Callantyre," he said. "But a glance or two at these documents made it clear to me that the sooner they were in your hands the better. Run your eye over them and see if you can bring yourself to agree with me."

"We should be interested to give it," said Mr. Brass civilly.

"Well, gentlemen, how much am I to give you for these papers?" His Lordship asked.

The Honorable John waved his hand.

"Nunno—nunno," he said. "They're your property already. We aren't blackmailers—everything else, maybe—ha-ha!—but not that. We have just looked in to return your own property to you in the ordinary way."



"Why, Squire," said the Easy Street Expert, "I cleared the safe last night; naturally I did! Who wouldn't—barring yourself?"

Gravely the rich man took out the collection. A photograph fell from among the papers and he started and flushed a little at sight of it. A look of relief began to dawn on his rather thin face.

He sat down and ran through the papers with the swiftness and precision of a man who knew them by heart—knew so exactly what should be there that a mental picture of each paper must have been indelibly engraved on his soul. And his face brightened, and the haggard look seemed strangely to leave him as his eyes flashed over the documents. Finally he put down the last one with a sigh.

"Yes. Complete—complete!"

He touched a bell and to the manservant who entered he said:

"Bring some champagne from Bin One!"

He smiled faintly at his visitors.

"It is said to be the best champagne in the country," he observed. "I should be interested to have your opinion of it."

"May I ask how they came into your possession?"

Mr. Brass shook his head.

"Why bother to go into details?" he said. "There they are—they're your own—they deal with an accident in your past which could happen to any man—and is nobody's business but your own. They were sleeping dogs that you weren't allowed to let lie! They are now dying dogs that you'd better let die. Take 'em, My Lord, tear 'em up, burn the bits and forget 'em. Take the advice of a man who has a natural gift for wise decision—"

The Colonel snorted.

"The man who was holding these over my head was a dangerous and incredibly cunning scoundrel. How did you contrive to outreach him?" asked Lord Callantyre.

Mr. Brass yawned slightly.

"Why, he wasn't much—just needed handling the right way. Maybe we know a little more about that kind than you do."

LORD CALLANTYRE looked penetratingly at the rough-hewn features of the partners, realized that for all the bland and easy amiability on their faces now, Mr. Brass was probably right. He nodded, thought for a moment, and then asked:

"May I ask if you gentlemen are familiar with Stock Exchange transactions? You are? That is good. Will you do me the favor to note that the ten-pound ordinary shares in my Company, Central African Gold Areas, Ltd., now stand at four pounds? In three weeks' time they will stand at not less than twenty-two pounds each. That is quite definite. You should not find it difficult to get an option on a fair number—through these stockbrokers."

He scribbled a name.

"One good turn deserves another," he said. "You need not permit yourselves a single second of doubt about the sure and certain profit which will accrue from a deal in those shares. I guarantee that. And now, wont you try this wine, gentlemen?"

They tried it like the stanch old wine-triers they were. . . . .

IT was perhaps one o'clock that night when Mr. Brass, just a shade blurred in his speech, paused on the landing just outside his bedroom and buttonholed his partner with his left hand. In his right he was carrying a pair of very large and shabby old soft brown leather slippers.

"Yes, Squire—as I said before, so I say again. This is what happened. Gaunte and his pal and his gal set out tonight to kill two birds with one sto'—one stone, I mean. The gal Sylvia was to call on our friend Callantyre and c'lect—an' collect—an installment of blackmail, while Gaunte and mo'r-driver called here and did us in with our own ass—asseg—ass—" He hissed like a serpent in pain—champagne. "Assessegais and stole our jewelry. Callantyre was in bed an' declined to see her—she came on to Gaunte here—jus' in time to reinforce him for second attempt on us. See that, Colonel? Perf'ly simple to any man natural gifts! Probably Sylvia went prepared to sell documents outri' if Callantyre offered enough. Time not ripe—cerrainly not. Maybe the woman failed handle thing in tactful manner like me. Great genius, these marrers, me, Colonel. See? I consider I've saved all our lives twice over s'evenin' an' made small fortune into the bargain. Tha's wonderful tip Lord Callantyre gave us!"

(Mr. Brass was right. They bought all the shares they could get and, a month later, sold out for a profit of nine thousand pounds odd.)

He stared blearily at his partner.

"You stick to your ol' partner, Colonel, an' he'll stick to you—hey?"

"Hic," said the Colonel.

And so to bed.

COLONEL CLUMBER it was, who, on the following morning, noticed first that the door of the secret safe in their smoking-room was slightly open.

"Hey—look there!" he snarled. "Gaunte and his crowd came back again last night—and got the jewels."

Mr. Brass looked up at the safe.

"Yes, Gaunte's a persevering hound, Colonel," he said calmly. "It's pretty evident they've been over the house in the night, though they left us alone—probably afraid of that bottle of gas—or had enough of the rough stuff for one night. Maybe they hadn't missed their dispatch-case—or if they did, put the theft of it down to some tramp or poacher or night-bird."

"Yes, but what about the jewels, you idiot!" bawled the Colonel. "Can't you *think* this morning? They're *gone*. And it's your own fault—you go out late and get tight—and here's the result!"

"Hey, Sing, fetch down my brown slippers," Mr. Brass said over his shoulder; then he moved over, peered into the empty safe and snicked the door shut.

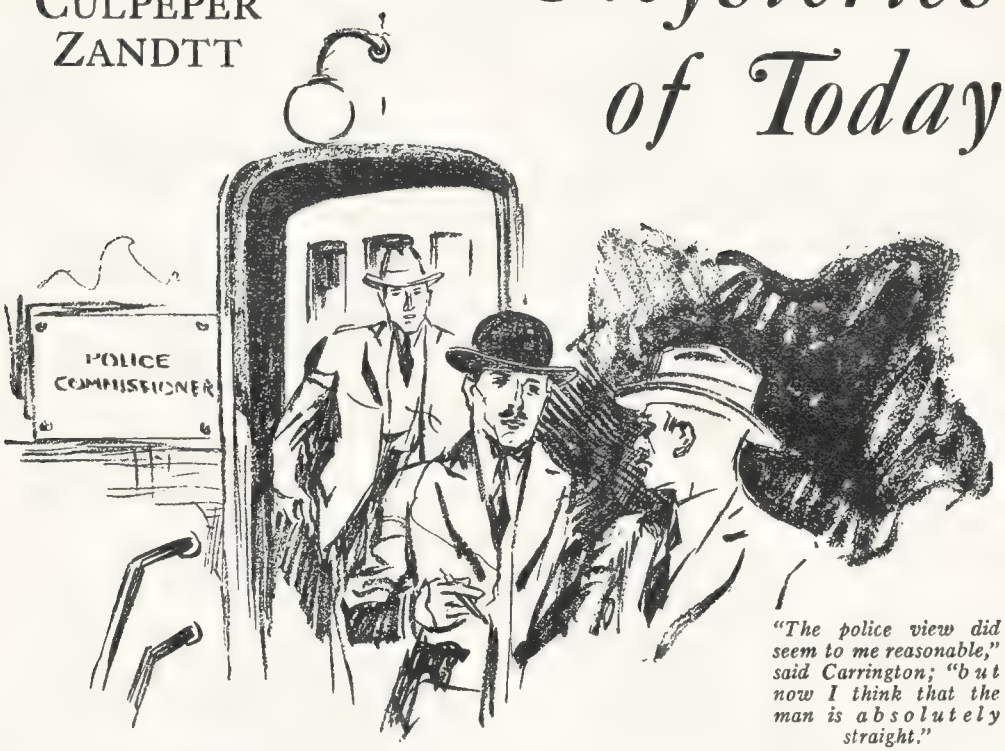
"Huh! Drilled the lock to fragments," he observed, turned away, and took his shabby old slippers from Sing. He upended these large vessels on the table. A multi-colored stream of flashing gems scattered themselves over the polished oak under the Colonel's gaze.

"Why, Squire," said the Easy Street Expert, "you must be getting old in your head, if you have arrived at the stage where you can believe that a few glasses of good champagne can get a man of my caliber into such a careless state that he forgets to take care of his own—and his poor buffalo-witted partner's! I cleared the safe last night while you were struggling with your tight boots out in the hall. Naturally I did. Who wouldn't—barring yourself?"

These engaging rascals will figure in another exploit—"The Haunted Rajah"—in the next, the March, issue.

Mysteries of Today

By CULPEPER ZANDTT



"The police view did seem to me reasonable," said Carrington; "but now I think that the man is absolutely straight."

"The Vanished Financier" details the solving of one of the most intriguing problems ever presented to a detective.

Illustrated by William Molt

ON Friday evening, it commenced to rain, and by nine o'clock the rain had become a softly falling mist.

At eight o'clock of this same evening the telephone had buzzed on the desk in John Maitland's study.

"Maitland speaking. Who is it?"

"Friend of yours. Pretty thick weather tonight—rather easy to get lost!"

"That's right—but I don't see what can be done about it. What's on your mind?"

"Not much. Never is. Still, there are one or two things which might be improved a bit. Coming to the club this evening?"

"Which one—yours or mine?"

"Play you a game or two at mine, if you like."

"All right—I'll try to leave before any of my wife's friends come in."

Three minutes later, the telephone had rung in F. B. Walters' library on Central Park West—and a similar dialogue ensued.

At nine o'clock, a man with a felt hat pulled down over his eyes, and his mackintosh-collar turned up around his chin, swung off the platform of a Madison Avenue trolley-car at Eighty-ninth Street. He walked through to Fifth Avenue and a few blocks up until he came to a certain house, where he rang the bell and was admitted by a discreet butler—who didn't offer to take his hat or coat but ushered him at once into a small library at the rear of the parlor floor.

When the butler had retired, closing the door after him, the visitor removed his hat and mackintosh, laying them on a chair in the corner. Then he pulled up another one by Sam Wentworth's desk with his back to both the parlor-door and the hall-door. They had been chatting a scant ten minutes when another caller was fetched in by the butler in the same way, and also sat down with his back to both doors.

Each of the visitors had come from his own club, which he had quietly left by a side entrance after staying a scant fifteen minutes in the building. Neither one had been recognized by the butler, who had been with Wentworth for several years

and had found that it paid him very well to mind his own business strictly.

WHEN cigars were lighted, Wentworth got down to business.

"Either of you fellows been getting any threatening letters lately?"

"Oh, we expect 'em as regularly as bills on the first of the month. Sometimes they're just ridiculous, but occasionally they're serious. Of course such letters are written by cranks who are mentally unbalanced—but still—"

"Well, on actual statistics, John, the writer of a threatening letter doesn't do serious harm oftener than once in a thousand times. Those, of course, we have to discount. But there's another type of crank who does more harm in a business way than the others do physically. For example, one skunk has been harping on five or six stocks which he accuses me of controlling. (He'd be surprised to know how thoroughly I'd be willing to if I could!) And he's been warning me that a coalition is being formed to squeeze me dry of all the shares I have—that the interests of the people demand that nothing of the sort should be in my hands. Doesn't say what his coalition means to do with the shares if they get 'em—but his socialistic inference is that they'd be divided up, *pro rata,* as far as they'd go."

"What stocks are they, Sam?"

"K. M. & B. is one—others are Universal Radio—Southwestern Utilities—Oregon Northwestern—and Consolidated Aircraft."

"Hmph! I'd give something to know just where the leak is! I've had letters about four of those stocks, myself. How about you, F. B.?"

"Same here—on the three last ones. Evidently those sharks haven't traced any connection between us three. I'd say they figure that either of us is likely to get control of one or more stocks in that group, and are determined to block anything of the sort by getting control themselves. The kernel in all this is that we may look for a bear-raid on those five stocks—and other stocks in which we're interested are going to slump in sympathy. I suppose your idea in going over the matter with us, Wentworth, was to lay out some plan of concerted protection."

"Why—I was going to suggest that to you fellows and see how you felt about it," replied Wentworth. "Don't know whether you're onto this or not—but Mike Shaughnessy and William K. Felthall hold blocks in each one of those stocks—particularly, in two of them. Maurice Francis holds a lot of Radio and Aircraft. Dig down deep enough and you'll find that those three were mutually interested in a few pools, several years ago. I've a fairly well-equipped information-bureau, and I learned more about that bunch than they suppose anyone knows. It's entirely possible that these letters we've been getting were instigated by one or all three of 'em, and that they're out for control in some of those stocks. You fellows use several different brokers whom you can trust pretty well, of course; one or two are known to be handling your business—the others are on the q.t. And I've some of my own. My idea would be to make no move whatever until one or more of those stocks goes down five points. Then instruct two brokers to put through a number of wash-sales—being dead sure that one buys what the other sells, after some jockeying—until the shares drop another five points. Then dump larger blocks on the market—being sure your other brokers get them. Below a certain point, we buy everything offered in either of the five stocks. How does that strike you?"

"Seems as though it ought to work. Of course that other crowd are planning to do exactly the same thing—but we'll have the advantage in their having no suspicion either that we're on to their real game or that we have any concerted understanding. We're supposed to be rather vindictive adversaries, in the Street. They'll think that individual stockholders are beginning to be squeezed out when the first blocks are thrown upon the market, and are likely to wait for a good deal lower price before they plunge."

"How would it be for us to start a few adverse rumors about English, French and German consolidations getting ready to go after the American market—rumors that laboratory and machine-shop experiments in Aircraft, Radio and Utilities show that too much attention has been paid to low cost—that the latest models don't stand up and will have to be scrapped? Seems to me that ought to depress the stocks quite a lot."

"You're dead right it will, Sam! Suppose I handle that end of it? I've a pretty good publicity-bureau for some of my pet interests—the boys will know exactly how to let that sort of thing leak out."

"Show Wentworth my initials on this sheet of paper. Tell him we've picked up all the Radio and Aircraft we want to hold."

When each of them had jotted down in a code of his own the main points agreed upon, Wentworth let Maitland and Walters out of the front door into the mist, and they made their way back to their respective clubs. The conference at Wentworth's house was not even suspected.

ON Monday morning, the market opened rather weak in the rails. By eleven, loungers in the various brokers' offices woke up to the fact that there was something doing in Aircraft and the Public Utilities. In the whole group, blocks of stock were being dumped on the market until each one was down six or eight points. By noon, a strong "bear"-raid had developed and other stocks were declining in sympathy.

By one o'clock, all sorts of rumors were flying about. Consolidated Aircraft was said to have found its latest models—whose development had cost two or three millions —showing a fatal weakness on long-sustained flights, with the prospect of having to abandon them altogether. It was stated —nobody knew by whom—that a European consolidation of various large interests owning considerable property in the United States were about to erect great "beam-stations" all around the globe, for radio-communication—both code and telephone—until the service-rates were forced down to those of the present land-wire service—all of which was sending down Universal Radio in six- or eight-point drops. By half-past one, Maitland, Walters and Wentworth had sold half their holdings in five different stocks—picked it up again at lower quotations, and a third more with it—but the bear-raid was now so alarmingly developed, with the stock-list declining all along the line, that Maitland and Walters found their attention seriously absorbed in protecting some of their other holdings. Maitland did some quick thinking on his own account—finally calling in a trustworthy clerk.

"Grimes, I'm going to give you a confidential errand—you'll have to watch your step. Go over to the Bankers' Trust Building, twenty-ninth floor. Find room twenty-nine ninety-eight, down a little side corridor at the end of the main hall—it doubles around twice. There's a push-button on the door-casing. Ring it three times —one short and two long. Samuel K. Wentworth will open that door if the bell rings at all. Show him my initials on this sheet of paper. Tell him we've picked up all the Radio and Aircraft we want to hold and have other troubles besides them. Ask if he wants to let 'em lie as they are for the present—and see how low they get to-

morrow. Don't let anybody see you talking with him!"

"Suppose he isn't there?"

"Hell—he's *got* to be there, in any such mess as this! If you can't see him, come back here quick and report!"

Grimes was back in twelve minutes—said he got no answer to the bell and heard no sound in the office. Maitland grabbed up his desk-phone, asking for the office of S. K. Wentworth.

"John Maitland speaking. I want Mr. Wentworth!"

"Not in, sir!"

"When do you expect him?"

"Probably not until tomorrow. A telegram came for him, and he left for his house, uptown—said he probably couldn't get back before the Exchange closed. Any message?"

"No. I thought he might be selling a stock I'm interested in. Tomorrow will do just as well, I guess."

Maitland called Wentworth's house next, there having been time for him to get home in one of the Wall Street taxis—which seem to have a knack of constant speed-limit violation without retribution. Wentworth's reliable old butler, however, said that his employer wasn't home and wasn't expected there until dinner-time. A later call drew the same answer.

MEANWHILE Wentworth's brokers, although they had received explicit orders before the Exchange opened that morning, were beginning to doubt whether those orders held good when the bottom seemed to be dropping out of everything. Some of his warmest friends—bankers, railway men, and directors on various Boards of Public Utilities and Industrials—began to notice that all his pet stocks were being raided and feel considerable apprehension. His interests were so widely scattered that if he actually were caught in a corner and squeezed dry, it would undoubtedly pull down dozens of other concerns influenced by his operations.

By the time the Exchange closed, haggard-looking men began to whisper that it looked like the beginning of a panic in the Street. If Sam Wentworth and six or eight other strong men came to the rescue next morning, nobody had any doubt that they would be able to stem the tide and assist many of the leading stocks to make a sharp recovery. It was even rumored that financial whales of such caliber as John Maitland and Frederick B. Walters might bury the hatchet long enough to give the market an upward boost. Two or three men had seen them getting into a taxi together, bound uptown, and the fact got into the late afternoon papers as an indication of how serious the situation might be.

Maitland and Walters were both members of the University Club and here, seated in a corner, where they could see anyone approaching in time to switch the subject, they conferred anxiously.

"I'm beginning to wonder if anything has happened to Wentworth? Had my confidential clerk call up his house again after the Exchange closed—but he hadn't turned up even then, and his office swore he left for there about one-thirty—said he had a telegram which decided him upon going up to his house at once. Could it have been some family trouble?"

"Easy enough to find that out! You gave your name to that butler of his when you called before, didn't you? S'pose he knows which Maitland you are?"

"Might—he's bright enough. But I doubt it."

"Then on the assumption that neither he nor Mrs. Wentworth knows that you and her husband are supposed to be on opposite sides in the Street, suppose you call him up—ask for her and see if she can tell you where to locate her husband," Walters advised.

Maitland went to the telephone and was back in five minutes.

"She said they had given up waiting for him and were dining now. Nobody is there waiting to see him—there's no knowing just where he may be. She admitted that he does things like this once in a while—not turning up until all hours—but usually phones if he expects to be away over night. When he gets side-tracked like this, she says, it's generally a case of meeting some old friend and going off with him."

"*H-m-m*—still we've had no explanation which would account for that telegram, and his starting for home in a taxi! He had some imperative reason for going home before the Exchange closed—when things were pretty hectic in the Street—and he hasn't arrived! I wonder which of the taxis he took? We know all of those chauffeurs—the regulars."

"Easy enough to find that out in the morning. I'm beginning to agree with you that it looks as if his disappearance is a part of what's been happening downtown,

today. If that's really so, we've got to get through the next few days without any suggestions or help from Wentworth—if we're lucky enough to avoid being kidnaped ourselves! Some of the letters I've had were rather drastic in their prophecies for me—and I guess you had some like 'em yourself! Well—how we going to play it? What we got today isn't a patch on what's coming tomorrow, according to my figuring!"

"Question is—with the bottom dropping out of everything—whether we can hold onto those stocks as we agreed with Wentworth—whether we'll not have to sacrifice 'em to keep our heads above water?"

"Now—hold on a bit, F. B.! When all this mess clears up, those stocks will be thirty or forty points higher than they were before this circus started. It looks to me as if we'd better sacrifice most anything else first. Near as I can figure, Wentworth's idea was a pool of us three controlling five or six stocks—all basically gilt-edged."

"But if we don't watch out the gang behind all this is going to get half our shirts before they're through!"

"Well—I sort of feel that Sam isn't going to be here! Let's play it as we agreed with him as long as we can and only sacrifice those stocks when we have to. If we can't keep up our margins, our brokers are going to smash and we with 'em."

"ANY line on who was doing most of the trading, today?" Walters queried.

"Smith and Elder told me that the most active brokers appeared to be Carbury and Atkins—and sent one of their clerks around to that office to have a look-see. One customer seemed to be sending in a stream of checks by messengers. The clerk caught the name and knows the man by sight—a commonplace-looking chap by the name of Whitby—Seth Whitby, I think. Dresses respectably but not conspicuously—gets his lunches in the dairy restaurants—supposed to live in some walk-up apartment on the West Side. He looks as if anything over three thousand a year would make him anxious about losing it—but Elder saw one of his checks for three hundred thousand, a short while ago. As far as he and his partner know, he has no connection whatever with Shaughnessy, Felthall or Francis—whom we've supposed were behind this bear-raid. They're *in* it all right—not much question about that, because their brokers have been doing a lot of the short-selling today—but this Seth Whitby bird seems to be playing a hunch all on his lonesome. Elder's clerk thinks he must have cleaned up half a million, probably trading through other brokers as well as Carbury and Atkins."

"Hmph! If a few more independents jump in and roll their hoops with the Shaughnessy-Felthall crowd, we'd better lock what we've got left in a cyclone-cellar and go down to Miami—if we have the price! This looks as much like bloody war tomorrow as anything I've seen in ten years. By thunder, I believe Sam had the right hunch! Those birds are going to take some awful chances—selling short as much as they've got to! If we only could catch 'em with their suspenders letting go—buy a darned sight more from 'em than they can deliver—we'd be sitting pretty, and they'd be doing a heap of thinking."

"Look here, F.B.—we know where nearly three hundred thousand of those shares are at this minute, if Sam has as many as we think he has in addition to ours, and what were dumped on the market this morning. There have been a good many more shares sold today than there are in existence, near as I can figure! Those fellows must be skating on a lot thinner ice than we are. Let's stick it out—if we can!"

By the time the morning papers were on the street, it was evident that the reporters had been busy all night. The taxi-chauffeur who had driven Wentworth uptown, after leaving his office, had been located and said that he had taken him to his house on upper Fifth Avenue—that the magnate was going up the steps to his front door, reaching in his pocket for his keys, as the taxi moved off. The chauffeur turned east at the next corner to go around the block, and just happened to look back as he did so. Wentworth had apparently gone in, and there was nobody else in sight along the block at that moment except a stoop-shouldered old man who was coming slowly and carefully down the steps of a house which seemed to be the second or third beyond Wentworth's. There were several men and women coming up the sidewalk of the block farther south, but they hadn't yet crossed the side-street. The taxi-driver was well known in the financial district as a perfectly straight man.

INQUIRY at the Wentworth house brought out the fact that, while the family were not really worried about him as yet, they were beginning to think his ab-

sence very unusual. They admitted a possibility of his letting himself in with his keys and quietly going back to his study without being seen by any of the servants, and even getting out again unobserved, but thought it most unlikely. It was something he naturally wouldn't have done without leaving some word with Jeffries or one of the family, because he was invariably considerate in such matters—and there was no evidence that he had been in his library.

With this data, all of the newspapers took the view that in some way he had been decoyed out of his house and abducted, presumably by the unknown interests back of the bear-raid. This opened the market that morning with a smashing attack all along the line. Between nine and ten, members of three brokerage firms through which Wentworth did much of his under-cover trading, came up to the office in the Bankers Trust Building for a conference with Joseph Saville, Wentworth's general manager.

"Where are we at, Saville? Had you any idea that the boss intended to be away today?"

"I know damned well that he didn't—that is, I know it as well as one can know anything about what such a man will do. He made particular arrangements with all of you for just such a circus as this if it really happened—and I'd say he knew it would happen, though just why he was so sure about it is more than I can tell. And he certainly expected to be where he could take any action he decided upon at a minute's notice. You want to know where you're at. I'd say, at his last instructions to you—carry them out as long as you can!"

"Suppose we get to a point where we're through—with liabilities more than we can swing—have to go out of business?"

"Well—I've power-of-attorney in four banks. I'll back you with half the cash on deposit, if I have to, in order to save you—but not otherwise. Don't get cold feet and come to me for cash when you don't really need it. I'll keep track of about where you stand, and I wont see you go under if I can help it."

After they had left, two of Wentworth's closest friends—associates in many deals—came into the private office and closed the door.

"Think the newspapers have got the right dope about this, Joe? Or is there some other possible explanation?"

Saville shrugged hopelessly.

"The Chief has disappeared! If he was lugged off somewhere by force, there's no saying whether he'll ever get back! Any gang unscrupulous enough for that sort of thing might feel that they were running less risk with him dead and out of the way than if he were a prisoner to be guarded and hidden away indefinitely. Dropping out of sight at such a time as this of his own will seems rather absurd—doesn't it?"

"I'll say so! The point is, are we going to let them get away with it—or find him and fetch him back?"

"Hmph! Only one answer to that! But where the devil can we begin? What can we do?"

"Raise hell with the police for a starter! This is the foulest kind of foul play—an outrage there shouldn't be any excuse for, if our police were really efficient! I was at the house this morning. His wife and daughter are getting scared—begged me to stir things up until he's found—and I mean to do it! We'll go up to Center Street first and see the Commissioner. Then I'm going to the editorial rooms of the *Luminary*—hunt up Tom Raynor, their star reporter, have him introduce me to his managing editor and see if I can't get a newspaper campaign started which will begin to dig out evidence we haven't yet got."

"My suggestion, Carrington, would be to hunt up Raynor first, and get the newspapers started. I know him—he's a live wire—and when things begin popping down here within an hour, the devil only knows where he's likely to be. Here! . . . . Call up his office and ask him to wait until you can get to Chambers Street!"

CARRINGTON did this, and was lucky enough to catch Raynor in.

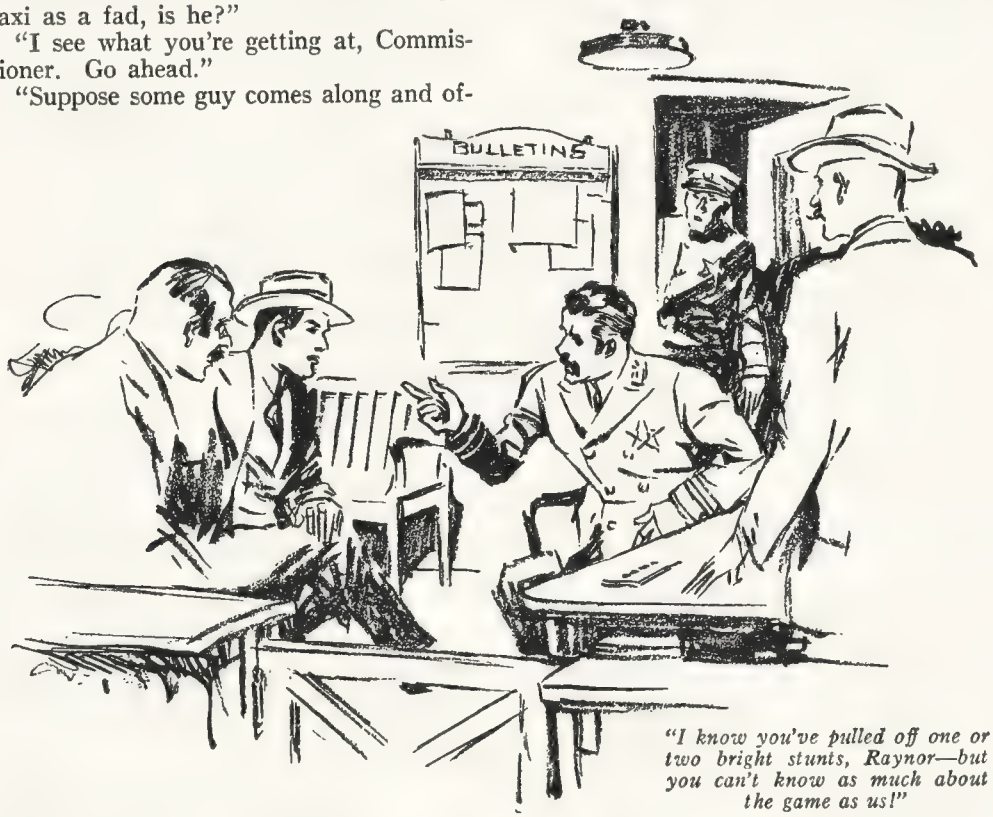
When they arrived at the *Luminary* office, he had Raynor also introduce Benedict, Wentworth's other friend, to the managing editor and heard him turn the search over to Raynor, who then went around to Center Street with them. The Commissioner instructed one of his lieutenants to have Wentworth's taxi-driver, Brady, put under close surveillance and arrested the moment he did anything out of his usual line. When the reporter mildly asked why the taxi-driver should be under suspicion, the Commissioner became sarcastic.

"He was the last man seen with Wentworth, wasn't he? . . . . The last man who

claims to have seen him! Right there is where the suspicion begins, Raynor. I know you've pulled off one or two pretty bright stunts in criminal investigation—but at that, you can't know as much about the game as us who were in it before you were born! Here—answer a question or two. That chauffeur isn't a rich man driving a taxi as a fad, is he?"

"I see what you're getting at, Commissioner. Go ahead."

"Suppose some guy comes along and offers him a couple of grand—in cash—to pull up at the curb on some side-street halfway uptown, open the door and poke his head in as if asking for the street and number again, jabbing a hypo into Wentworth's leg as he speaks—penning him up in the cab with the opposite door locked so he can't struggle out before the stuff works, then tote him off to some place in the suburbs where he has been told to go. Would he take that couple of grand or wouldn't he?"



"I know you've pulled off one or two bright stunts, Raynor—but you can't know as much about the game as us!"

"Well, let's just go into that a bit. Those taxi-drivers down in the Wall Street district are all of them regulars—known to pretty much everyone in the neighborhood. Of course outsiders do happen along, but they get very little business. Brady is one of the old regulars. He's driving a taxi down there because it's the easiest way of making money that he knows. He owns his cab, and four others; gets a tip every little while, plays it, and cleans up good money. Two thousand dollars wouldn't be any temptation at all to him, because he would know that if ever suspicion were pinned on him for a job of that sort, he never could show his nose around Wall Street again. I may be away off on the amount, but at a guess I'd say that Brady is making at least ten or fifteen thousand a year—possibly more. You see, Commissioner, the man is too well known, and doing too well as he is. Shadow him if you like—but don't arrest him until you're dead sure you have some excuse for it. His friends in the Street would make it pretty hot for you if you did."

When the three left police headquarters, Carrington expressed his belief that the reporter was right, though he had taken the police view at first.

"It did seem to me reasonable, you know—along with Brady's being the last person seen with Sam. But I think now that the man is absolutely straight—he's driven me more than once. What would be your idea as to where we might begin?"

"I'm going to make a suggestion, Mr. Carrington. There's a friend of mine down in your neighborhood who has solved at least a dozen mysteries which were baffling both the police and the newspapers. I'll admit they were too much for me—and when we worked a couple of them out together, Bart Normanton's methods of inference and deduction were so much more scientific than mine that I could see just where all of us had fallen down. Even the Commissioner, had you asked him, would have admitted that Normanton has several times put it all over the police department with his psychological intuition. Now, Normanton is the short-cut in what we're trying to do, even if there's a chance we might eventually solve the mystery ourselves. Naturally, however, he doesn't work for nothing. Shall we call him in as expert, or not?"

"Well, I never knew you to make a statement you couldn't back up, Raynor," Carrington said slowly. "If you say that this fellow is a wonder-man at mysteries, I guess you know what you're talking about—and we certainly need assistance!"

"I suppose, with what's happening today, you can't afford to be away from your offices much longer, can you?"

"Ought to be there, of course—but if you think an hour with your friend is worth the time spent, let's go and consult with him—right now!"

ON the twenty-fifth floor of a towering new building below Wall Street, Raynor took them into a good-sized studio, twelve feet high—the south side being mostly one big mullioned window looking down the Bay.

Here the reporter introduced them to a tall man with strong features, who had been at work upon a canvas near the window. His face lighted up when he learned their errand.

"Do you know, gentlemen—I had been wondering myself, this morning, just what could have happened to Mr. Wentworth! I spent a week-end on his yacht a couple of years ago—liked him very much. You want to find him, do you—in about the shortest time it can be done? Of course, one or two theories have occurred to me since yesterday evening's papers came out. If one of those theories should happen to be right, you may not locate Mr. Wentworth for some weeks, and he wont be in good shape to look after business for a little while after that. If there's anything in the other one, we may find out where he is a little sooner—but not, I think, within a week."

"Have you any idea he may have been killed, Mr. Normanton?" asked Benedict anxiously.

"There is that chance, of course," Normanton agreed. "If the gang behind this bear-raid had anything to do with his disappearance, they're possibly men who wouldn't hesitate at murder if they considered it worth the risk. But I've some doubt as to whether they are behind it. Wentworth had other enemies—and doubtless other complications in his social or business life which might be responsible for his disappearance. Well—I'll be glad to help you, but I may have to spend some money before I locate him. If through my efforts the man gets back into his own office in shape to do business—or back in his own home with a good chance for recovery—you can give me six thousand dollars. If not, there'll be no charge whatever except for what disbursements I'm obliged to make. Does that seem fair?"

"Hmph! . . . . Do it inside of a week and I'll make it *ten* thousand, Mr. Normanton—divide the expense with Raynor's paper!"

"Right! And now let's get at some of the data at once. Of course you haven't photographs of Wentworth with you, because you'd no idea of consulting me when you left home—but could you telephone anywhere and get hold of them within the next hour or two? Say a couple of full-length ones and two studies of the face."

"His daughter would fetch down to my office whatever they have in the house. May I use your phone?"

"Sure—but wait a minute! What men do you suspect as being at the back of this raid?"

"Shaughnessy, for one. Also William K. Felthall, and Maurice Francis. Those three undoubtedly are in it—guess the whole Street would swear to that! Then there's another who was doing a lot of trading on the bear side, yesterday afternoon, and is undoubtedly at it again right now—Seth Whitby. Commonplace-looking chap, with the sort of face and figure that never would strike you in a crowd.

"He first began to speculate a bit—but always by himself, playing a lone hand—about a year ago. Turns up long enough to take a little flyer on the market and then

goes West again. He's a Californian, they say. Come to think of it, Wentworth himself must have known the man out there, because he certainly bought something from him. It may have been a mine, or possibly a small railroad, for when he first turned up here, he had three or four big checks of Sam's with which he opened an account in two different banks. They took the precaution of asking Sam if the paper was all right, and he said it was—that Whitby was probably good for a million at least. But their acquaintance seems to have begun and ended with that deal out West."

"WELL, just in case I happen to run across either of those four in a place where he ought not normally to be, it'll be useful to know just how he looks," said Normanton. "I say, Tom! Your paper must have pictures of them in the morgue? Could you lend 'em to me until I can make copies?"

"Sure—if we have 'em!" Raynor agreed.

"If not, you dig some up—even if you have to go gunning with a camera and shoot 'em on the street. I want their height and weight too—also Wentworth's. That'll tell me how small a space any one of 'em might be packed in. Want to know what sort of clothes they wear, usually—what their habits are—personal peculiarities, if any. I know Wentworth's pretty well—but get me the others'. By the way—is Wentworth interested in the theater, at all? Does he like to see a good show, or know any actors and actresses—the prominent ones?"

"Why—yes he does. I believe he's even a member of the Players down in Gramercy Park. Before he was married, I think Sam used to be in a little amateur dramatic club with several of his friends. Some of them afterward went on the stage, and he's always kept up the acquaintance. Of course, they've made professional reputations by now, and stand pretty well in society."

"H-m-m—I suppose when you get back to your offices, there'll be enough going on to put Wentworth's disappearance entirely out of your minds. But if you should have any time you can give to it, is there any possible way by which you can get hold of the gross amount in trading done by that bear-gang and Whitby—yesterday and today?"

"Not accurately, of course. But there are frequently 'leaks' in all brokers' offices, if you don't mind using rather piratical methods and spending a little money for information. Of course, where the big fish are trading secretly through brokers not associated with them, information of that sort would amount to a market tip which might be worth hundreds of thousands—and they cover it up so that it's almost impossible to spot them until weeks afterward, when the information is of no use to anybody. But it's not so difficult to pick up some hint of their trading through brokers who are known to handle their business. Suppose that two such brokerage firms have sold for them approximately so many thousand shares in a certain time—during a very active market. The extent of their trading with those two houses might be some *pro-rata* indication of the amount they also might be doing with two, three, or four other firms under cover. The brokers most active on the floor would be another indication as to whether they were merely protecting customers in a conservative way or actively engaged in the raid.

"In such conditions as we're having today, nobody in the Street would have the time or inclination to make any cold-blooded analysis like that; they couldn't—it isn't human nature. But a chap like Raynor here, who isn't interested in the market at all beyond its news value, could do it from the visitors' gallery if he knew enough of the brokers on the floor by sight—and I guess he does. If he spent an hour in Carbury and Atkins' customers'-room, he'd have a fairly good chance to get a line on Whitby, who in an ordinary market sends in his checks and orders by messenger, like the other three. When there's a slight panic on, however, he can't spare the time it takes for messengers, but likes to be where he can get an order on to the floor of the Exchange in two minutes. He has no office of his own—likes to do his trading under cover and then get out of sight uptown—doesn't trust anybody—thinks he makes more money and smaller losses by not trusting 'em."

"Then, Tom, if you stick around with Carrington and Benedict for the next two or three hours, you're likely to pick up a good deal of what I'll need. Get all the pictures to me as soon as you can; you might get another man from the paper to act as messenger while you're busy in the Street. Get a snapshot or two of Whitby, if you can—and the other three also."

Carrington was frankly puzzled.

"I'm beginning to have some of Raynor's confidence in you, Normanton—but

I'm darned if it doesn't seem to me that half the information you want is irrelevant to the job of locating Wentworth! All this data about the amount of trading those four birds are doing, for example!"

"Don't blame you for thinking so, Mr. Carrington. But if I locate your friend, you wont care particularly how I do it, will you? That reminds me of another point: What other big operators are there who hold any of Wentworth's stocks, or who deal in 'em?"

"John Maitland and F. B. Walters. They're usually against Sam in the market. But his wife said that a Mr. Maitland called her up three times, yesterday, about Sam. I was at the University Club last evening and saw both those men there—saw Maitland go to the telephone twice. It might be possible that they were interested along with Sam, this time."

AS Raynor and the two financiers went through the narrow cañon of New Street, there was a muffled roar like surf upon a shelving beach. Clerks and messengers darted in and out of the Exchange entrances like so many angry hornets looking for trouble. And anyone in that district would have testified to the trouble—the bottom appeared to have dropped clear out, and stocks were on the toboggan all along the line.

Raynor got a very good chance, however, to study Whitby.

Whitby was a man of medium size, but appeared rather below that, because of a round-shouldered stoop which implied an older man than was indicated by his face. He had sandy hair, apparently turning gray. There were deep pouches under his eyes, and lines of strain about his nose and mouth. His clothes were a trifle small for him, but otherwise well made, of a medium-priced material, and were carelessly worn. He seemed about the last man below the City Hall that one would have taken for a daring and skillful operator—yet, from what Raynor picked up that day, he had made considerably over a million dollars in the past forty-eight hours. . . . .

At six o'clock the following evening Raynor arrived at Normanton's studio with the last of the data asked for, and saw that his friend had made life-size charcoal sketches of Wentworth, Shaughnessy, Felthall, Whitby and Francis. There was no getting away from the fact that Normanton was probably among the seven or eight most gifted portrait artists in the country—for in each instance the likeness was one from which the original might have been picked out in any crowd.

"Got any idea what really *has* become of Wentworth, Bart?" asked Raynor.

"I think I could take you to where he is within an hour, almost any time," Normanton replied casually. "Are Carrington and Benedict likely to come here this evening?"

"Not without calling up to make an appointment. Why do you ask? Don't you want to see them? If you really meant what you said about knowing where their friend is, they'll be darned glad to hear it right away!"

"Yeah! . . . . But how about him? He mightn't be so tickled about it."

"For the love of Mike—why *not?* Think he enjoys being kidnaped?"

"Tom, old boy, I've tried your friendship and loyalty to your paper several times; I've got to do it again. If I take you to a certain unoccupied, isolated house outside of the city, and let you find Wentworth there either tied up or bolted into a cellar-room, and he tells you the story of his abduction, with all the frills—will you be content to print that in your paper and keep it from snooping around after the rest of the story? You and the *Luminary* get the credit of finding Wentworth; you get a thrilling story, considering all the circumstances connected with this panic. But will you drop it there? The rest of the story is one of those which can't be told—not even to Wentworth's friends."

"Suppose the other papers get hold of clues and dig 'em out—scoop us on what should be our beat?"

"They *can't* if you keep your mouth shut—and your paper doesn't print what it might suspect! Either you and Kent, your managing editor, agree to that—or else you can't come with me to rescue Wentworth. I mean it, son—and you'll agree with me that it's necessary, even though you weep over the whale of a story you're missing. Now let's get dinner somewhere—then go up to Center Street and have a little fun with the Inspectors."

It was a perfectly normal proceeding for the reporter and his friend to call at police headquarters for the purpose of finding out whether there were any new developments in the Wentworth case. The lieutenant on duty said that a still-alarm had been sent out to the police of near-by towns and that

"Take another look—see any resemblance now?" asked Normanton. Raynor was dumfounded.

news might come in any moment over the phone—but as far as he knew, the magnate might be at the bottom of the Atlantic.

Raynor remarked that he didn't see how it was possible for a man to drop completely out of sight without leaving a trace of *any* sort—particularly a man whose picture had been so frequently in the rotogravure supplements. The lieutenant only snorted disgustedly, and looked closely at the reporter's companion.

"Say! You're Normanton, aint you—the man who has done a bit of criminal investigation on your own hook? Yeah—I see you are! Well, now—you got as much as we have to go on, aint you? Think you can dig up this guy Wentworth and hand him back to his friends?"

"Why—er—yes, I think so. It shouldn't be so difficult."

"Well, you go ahead an' do it—see?"

WHEN the two were back in the studio, Normanton looked at the clock.

"Just nine. About two hours before there's any use going uptown after evidence which I expect to nail before morning. So I might as well put you wise, Tom. The first bit of glaring evidence which everybody has overlooked is that bent old man whom Brady saw coming down the steps of a house beyond Wentworth's. At that distance, in one quick look, he couldn't have told whether it was some other house or Wentworth's own; as a matter of fact, it was the latter; but Wentworth never went into the house. He certainly didn't stand there indefinitely on the steps—and he certainly did go away. So anyone seen coming down his steps, with nobody else in sight on that block, during that sixty seconds, must have been Wentworth himself—it simply couldn't have been anyone else! And if he imitated a stoop-shouldered man ten or fifteen years older than himself, so well that none of the neighbors recognized him, he's a corking good actor. Hence my questions about his interest in the theater. Next, we have the extremely abnormal conditions in Wall Street. A man of his experience and intelligence must have gotten some advance hint about this bear-raid on his stocks. Maitland and Walters—usually his adversaries, but dealing in some of his stocks—must have had some secret understanding with him about protecting those in which all three were interested. They were mighty anxious to locate him yesterday, and undoubtedly are yet—but with no opportunity for getting advice from him, his manager and his brokers will carry out his last instructions just as long as they can. Do you follow me—so far?"

"Well—I'm beginning to catch the infer-

ence all right—but I think it's a crazy one! There are a hundred arguments against it!"

"Wait a while—I'm not through yet! Now let's figure a little on what Wentworth had in mind that he wanted to do in the market. He was specially interested in five different stocks—enough so to pick up all he could at prices that were attractive—but he hadn't control in any one of them, and I can see where he may have had three different mergers in mind if he could get control. All right! He anticipates this bear-raid and arranges a little campaign in advance which he knows will be carried out as long as possible. Then he figures that if he suddenly drops out, the selling would get pretty reckless all along the line—whoever is behind the raid would think they had nothing to worry about with him out of the way, and would raid the market by selling a lot of stock they haven't got—and *can't* get! If he happened to be where he could do business just about that time, he could get that crowd where they wouldn't have a shirt left, couldn't he?"

"Hmph! . . . . You're building all that up on the assumed certainty that Brady told the exact truth—that he couldn't have been in the least mistaken about anything he thought he saw—and that this Whitby appears to be making a killing! Any one of those assumptions may be wrong!"

"No, no! If they were wrong they couldn't possibly fit together as they do. But I'll admit that I've been seeing something you haven't—not being yourself an artist. Come over here! Now watch! I'll just fasten up my sketches of Wentworth and Whitby, side by side. Examine them closely. D'you see any resemblance?"

"No—nothing more than the general shape of head and facial outline. Wentworth was as straight as a cedar—carried himself like an officer, which, by the way, he was—Spanish War. Whitby is stoop-shouldered, at least two inches shorter, and ten or fifteen years older!"

"I haven't drawn anything like that in my sketch. You're depending on your memory of the man as you saw him, instead of your eyesight at this moment. Now watch!"

With a chunk of sponge-rubber, Normanton softly erased the pouches under Whitby's eyes and the strained lines around his nose and mouth—a faint smudge of shadow in the hollow of the cheeks—and put a tiny prism of high-light in the pupil of each eye, making it sparkle with life.

Then he stepped back a few feet.

"Take another look. See any resemblance now?"

Raynor was dumfounded—it seemed like a trick of legerdemain.

"For the love of Pete! Still, that doesn't make one of 'em two inches taller! I stood right alongside of that bird, you know!"

"If he straightened up, he'd get back those inches quickly enough! If he put on the sort of clothes the other one wears, Mrs. Wentworth would never question his identity. Come on—let's be getting uptown! Whitby will be laying low in his den and getting plenty of sleep until this panic is over. As I remember Wentworth, he liked to read himself to sleep with a mystery story while he smoked a bed-time cigar. Reckon he'll be doing that about now. Come along!"

THEY reached a walk-up apartment in the West Nineties and Normanton silently led the way up to a suite on the top floor which he had located after trailing Whitby home on the previous afternoon.

They had to ring a second and a third time before they heard padding footsteps on the other side of the door. Then it was opened a couple of inches, on the chain—showing a glimpse of Whitby's pajama-clad figure. Evidently he wasn't in very good humor.

"Well! What's your excuse for waking people up at this time of night?"

"Want a few minutes' talk with you, Mr. Whitby."

"Suffering cats! Your nerve ought to be valuable to somebody, man! Come around earlier some evening!"

"When you're sure to be out—eh? Look here, old chap!" Normanton had kept his voice very low. "Do you really want the newspapers to get hold of where we found Wentworth?"

"What's that? Hmph! Come in! I'll just bolt this door. . . . . Now, what's all this cock-and-bull nonsense about?"

"Remember inviting me off on your yacht for a week-end, two or three years ago? I can tell you who were aboard, if necessary. I'm Normanton, you know—supposed to be an artist—too good a one to be fooled by even your corking good make-up."

"Hmph! . . . . You would have been if there hadn't been a faint odor somewhere else! Where was it? Where was the leak?"

Normanton briefly strung together his

chain of evidence, as he had for Raynor—and the magnate gave them a specimen of his quick decision in emergencies.

"All right, Normanton! You've a damned sight more intelligence than the newspapers or police. Well? It's a hold-up, I suppose—how much do you two want to keep your mouths shut until Wentworth goes home again?"

"When he does—I get six thousand, plus expenses, from your friend Carrington, and from Raynor's paper. Don't you think that's enough?"

"If I walk back of my own accord, they wont pay it!"

"Possibly not. But you can't do that."

"Why can't I?"

"Because every paper in the city will begin digging away at where you've been—and why. If you really weren't kidnaped—just quit, and let panic loose by your absence—they'll print things that will hound you out of the country."

"Look here, Normanton! I fixed things so that none but pirates and speculators could very well get hurt in this—and nobody outside of such *will* be hurt! I'm positive of that!"

"Makes no difference—the papers will whitewash the speculators—arouse public sympathy on their side when you make 'em pay up. They'll put you in a rotten light, as a Wall Street shark who deliberately baited a trap in order to fill his own pockets. Of course Raynor and I know you've been risking most of what you've got to keep the market up and prevent a disastrous panic—but the Socialist papers will have all the ammunition they want and the decent ones can't get away from your playing a damned clever put-up job.

"Let's see what you can do, and come out of it all right. . . . . If Raynor and I happen to find you locked up in a cellar under some isolated, abandoned house in the suburbs — unshaved — half-starved — clothes and body indicating abuse—you'll get all the sympathy there is, and everybody will say your kidnaping was a frightful outrage at the hands of unknown scoundrels, who started the panic. You simply can't be shown up as Whitby—or it will ruin you! That's all there is to it!"

"By the Lord Harry, you're right! I hadn't stopped to size up that side of the proposition. That scheme of yours is a peach! Do you know of an old house like that well enough to be sure it isn't already used by tramps or yeggs?"

"I think I know just the place—down on Staten Island."

"How long would I have to stay there?"

"Not more than two hours in the cellar. You and I would go down ahead in a car —with an old suit of mussed-up clothes. Give you an hour to get your skin and neck dirty, and put them on. Stay inside this flat a couple of days without shaving, before we go. Raynor follows us in another car with two reporters and a couple of cops. They find me waiting outside behind some bushes, on watch. We guide 'em in and rescue you. As for the story you tell—that'll have to be gone over carefully. Got anything better to suggest?"

"Nothing half so good—if you'll just give me one more day in the Street. That'll get me rescued about Saturday. But how much to you chaps for not giving a word of this to the newspapers or anyone else?"

"I don't know how much the paper will give Raynor—but I'll get my six thousand all right. Raynor's in a tantalizing position —but I think he realizes that it can't be told. Don't you, Tom?"

"Oh, hell, yes! If no widows and orphans have been hurt in the panic—and Wentworth has punished the pirates who started it, by taking their hides—I think even our managing editor would see it that way. I don't know a damned thing beyond finding him locked up in that cellar!"

"Well, I'm certainly under obligations to you gentlemen," said Wentworth heartily. "And—er—if your banks should notify you that some unknown friend has deposited a small legacy in each of your accounts, I think it would be a courteous thing to do if you accept them without trying to run the fellow down. His intentions obviously will have been friendly ones. Now go home —and let me find out how Scotland Yard solved that 'Bent-pin Mystery'!"

WENTWORTH'S dramatic rescue by Raynor and Normanton was newspaper copy for some time because the kidnaping outrage at such a critical moment aroused a storm of protest. It became known that owing to his previous arrangements, and the loyal support of his brokers and friends, Wentworth had actually obtained control of his three pet stocks, in spite of being spirited away at such a critical time.

Lieutenant Gerraghty remarked sarcastically to Raynor that he detected a faint odor of fish somewhere which he couldn't seem to locate!

The Brush Island Bogey

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Drama, glamour, charm—these colorful South Seas stories, by a writer who herself lives in this remote region, have all of these special merits, and a fine individual quality besides.

"I TELL you, madame," said the native, "it was a bad pearl."

"What do you mean, bad?" demanded Vaiti, standing above him like an avenging fury, fierce and beautiful, her island robe draped high on her thighs, a fish-spear in her hands. She looked, at that moment, as if she might be about to plunge the barbed points into the man.

He, on his part, stared at her callously.

"Bad pearl," he repeated, using the pigeon French that all "Canaques" can speak. "No one give anything for it in Noumea. I know. I have found and sold pearls since I was small boy, and never I have seen that kind; they do not buy such. Black pearl they buy. Pink pearl they talk about; I see him never. This kind not a pearl at all."

"And Simoni, who was here yesterday, took it and gave you—five francs?" demanded Vaiti, the breath coming quick through her fine nostrils. "And you are my servant who dives for me—me! Have you forgotten about the white man you killed, and how I told the lie? I can untell that lie, and have you guillotined—*click!* And your head will fall into the basket!"

"Madame, madame!" protested the Canaque, his brown eyes showing white all round, his naked chest beginning to heave. "Madame, it was of no value, or I'd not have given it. I thought, this is rubbish, I will throw it away—and then, while I was rolling it on the sand, Monsieur Simoni came, and said he: 'Eh, Shalli, you will get into trouble if you try to sell that for a pure pearl; still, I don't say you might not manage to cheat some one with it in a half light.' And I said: 'Monsieur, I don't want trouble. I have had the gendarmes in my village once.' And he said: 'There, no one will buy it, but because you have a pretty sister who is friends with me'—and that is true, madame—'I will disembarrass you of it,' he said, 'for I am a smart trickster, and maybe I can make ten francs on it, if I give you five.' So I took the five, and he put it in his pocket, but carelessly, as one puts a stone or a shell. And he went away in his boat, and he was laughing as he went, because of the trick he meant to play. It is true that he is a great trickster, that one!"

"Pigface!" cried Vaiti, falling back into the "beach-de-mer" that was her native tongue. "Go 'long—go 'long, suppose you no want I kill you!"

TONE rather than words carried to Shalli the conviction that he was not wanted. He picked up the basket of pearl shells, which he had patiently cleaned without result, and trudged away down to his canoe. The chieftainess was angry; it was hard to say why. Women, white, brown, and brown-white, were unaccountable creatures.

"Wot are you whipping the cat abart, any'ow?" demanded Harris, my pal, the master of the *Lovina,* who was standing on the coral beach. "Wot do you want with a bad pearl?"

Vaiti had pulled herself together; later she would undoubtedly be revenged on Simoni, the low-type trader who had on more than one occasion got the better of her in a deal. But her rage, for the moment was past. She looked, now, less like a fury, and more like what she was—the daughter of Pacific kings and English peers, impressive, distinguished, even in a wet white frock tied up too high, with a mat of green leaves among her curls in lieu of hat, and a fish-spear in her hand.

"Blue pearl," she said succinctly.

I shouted.

"Did you see it?" Harris asked her curiously.

"I beg your pardon," objected the fourth person present,—of whom I have not spoken before,—"but you must allow me to correct you. Pearls are not found in a blue color. The only known shades are white, gray, black, and pink."

"Rats!" said Harris. "A darky found one on Dunk Island, off of North Queensland, about nineteen 'undred and one, and they sold it for a mint of money."

"Some mistake," persisted the other. He was a young small man, in a very neat suit of tailored khaki, with sun-helmet, green-lined umbrella, and brown buckskin boots, all of the best. He had come out from Noumea to the Isle of Pines in a specially chartered power-boat. He was a nice youth, very gentle and well-mannered—very, very certain that what he did not know was not knowledge, but much too sure of that, and of himself, to put on any airs.

"'E says," remarked Harris explanatorily, "that he's a binologist."

"Belay there," advised Vaiti, who sometimes remembered that she had been brought up on the deck of a schooner.

"Mr. Jeems," Vaiti explained to us, "he been hired my boat, want to catch fish along this island, an' I want him to go Bruss Island first, what way I can see Simoni when he come look for some more blue pearl."

"My dear lady, there are no—" began Jeems; but she swept him aside.

"I show Shalli some colored beads, before you come up. I say, what bead this pearl like? He take out a blue bead, he say 'All-a-same.' Then I savvy what Simoni done—an' I wan' to cut the liver out of him!"

"Do you think he'll come along to Brush Island? Why?" I asked. We were on the mainland of the great Isle of Pines, close to the deserted villa where Vaiti lived. Some good way off, across a plain of marbled malachite sea, lay the Ile de la Brosse, that curious freak of Nature—an island shaped exactly like a clothes-brush, groves of New Caledonian pine forming the bristles, and a long spur of rock the handle.

"He come there, because he think Shalli get that blue pearl on Brush."

"Did he?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Pearl like that, don't matter where you get him, you not find another."

"Well, what do you want to go over to Brush for, then?" I asked, not unreasonably.

"I camp there till Simoni come back. I want to talk to him." Her voice took on the quality of sweetness that, with Vaiti, could always be interpreted inversely.

JEEMS admired her, I could see. He drew himself up a little so as to show off his figure (Mr. Jeems was the new young sort of scientist, no snuffy professorism about him) and explained his entire willingness to alter any plans, in order to suit her.

"The marine biology of all this part of the world is exceptionally interesting," he said. "I don't anticipate that one island will greatly surpass another in the interest of the data it may provide."

"You're right, Mister," contributed Harris surprisingly. "All sailormen knows that the seas round New Caledonier is damn' queer. I dunno another place that's liable to have so many brain-fever kinds of beasts about it—unless maybe the tail end of New Guinea, and that's not more than about eight 'undred mile away, any'ow."

"I shall try to include New Guinea in my itinerary," said the young man, politely. Nevertheless one felt that Harris, to him, was the least and lowest of sea-beasts, less deserving of consideration than a jellyfish in a pool.

Harris, the insensitive, went on:

"And I don't advise none of you—not Vaiti, nor Richardson, nor you, sir—to go campin' on Brush Island, not with the name it's got. As for me, you couldn't tempt me, with all the pearls all the colors of the rainbow between 'ere and Frisco. Because they wouldn't be much use to me if I was dead."

Jeems seemed incapable of paying Harris —or indeed myself—more than half attention.

"Undoubtedly," he replied, in his absent-minded, courteous way, "pearls would be of comparatively little use under the circumstances you mention." He turned to Vaiti. "May I suggest that we start for the island shortly, so as to allow of collecting work before dark?"

VAITI was looking somewhat oddly at Harris.

"Where you getting that fool talk?" she demanded.

"From the ship's company of the barkentine *Columbia,* timber ship, which was wrecked 'ere or 'ereabouts in eighteen ninety-nine," he answered deliberately. "I knew the second mate and an A.B., afterward, in Fiji. The bo'sun slep' on that hisland and died. The carpenter slep' there and died. The hothers, they was on Pincushion, and none of them died. You seen Pincushion comin' up," he reminded the young man Jeems.

"Quite, quite," said Jeems, lighting a small gilt-tipped cigarette.

"Natives, they wont sleep there, not for Father Peter," went on Harris, with the slow relish, the large leisurely manner, of one who has been used to time his talk by watches, not of land but of sea. I could see that he fretted Jeems indescribably. "But there's been another white man or two died there since. All day the place is right as rain, and hif you don't sleep, just keeps awake on it and walkin' about, nothink 'appens. But if you sleeps, right out on the beach, too, where you can see for miles, and nobody could come near you, you're as dead as doornails in the morning."

He looked triumphantly at Mr. Jeems, who (with his usual habit of half-attention) was beginning a learned comment on the ancient practice of nailing pirates' skins on church doors—"hence, no doubt, the origin of the term"—when Vaiti cut short the uneven conversation.

"More better we go," was her brief command. And it was so.

NOW, I suppose that everything would have gone off in an entirely commonplace and uninteresting way; that, in fact, we should merely have had a picnic, and come back—only for me. You see, I fell in love.

Not with Vaiti; that was done years ago. No, it was with Brush Island. I do not expect that anyone will understand me, save those—necessarily few—who have fallen in love with islands themselves. But they will know how it was. They will recall the warm thrill of delight that runs through you, when you see an island that you want to own. They will remember how the place seems to speak to you, to call; how, instantly you wish to be alone with it, know it your property, and never, never let anyone else set foot on it until you die. . . . .

Brush Island lies a good way out. It has pale untrodden beaches, bordered by grass that is long and satiny and cool gray-green; behind the grasses come stiff pandanus, and bright green bushes with star-like flowers, and then there are casuarinas, unsubstantial and feathery, the stuff that dreams are made of. They are always blowing softly in the sea-wind; and the grass ruffles, and the stiff pandanus rattles its leaves like paper; flowing movements all —and behind stand up the pines that make the bristles of the "brush," high, stark, unmoved as steel in any wind that blows. I swear they are alive. They think!

Beyond are milky jade shallows, and the stumbling foam and ceaseless, triumphant galloping of "white horses," mile on mile of reef, ruled white across the green. The key of color is so high that you can almost hear it, shrill and merry above the actual resounding note of the reefs; and below the reefs, again, you can all but catch the deep bourdon note of the black pines, making a steady bass to the treble blue-green-jade of the water.

Oh, but I loved it, desired it! I am no longer young. I have wandered much of the world. To have a hut on the Ile de la Brosse, and never leave it any more, seemed to me in that moment better than

heaven. But I said nothing. People do not understand. . . . .

Harris, jumping off the bow of the boat into shallow water, his trousers rolled up to his knees, shouted that he saw a shoal of fish. "I'll get them for you; leave me be for a bit," he said.

"Fish!" exclaimed Mr. Jeems, beginning to undo his apparatus of nets and boxes. "Where?"

"I seen them," was all that Harris replied. "This is a proper place for mullet."

And I saw that, on my perfect isle, food would never be wanting. And that made me more eager than ever to live there.

Mr. Jeems was exceedingly grieved. "Damned unscientific, that sort of thing," he said—after he had secured a specimen

"What do you mean—a bad pearl?" demanded Vaiti, standing above the native like an avenging fury.

He was feeling in his pockets, taking dynamite out of one, caps and fuse out of another—began digging holes in a plug with his penknife. "Is that safe, my man?" asked Mr. Jeems distrustfully. Harris took no notice, except to say, "Keep out of it." And as I saw that he was cutting his fuse to three inches, I did.

The plug was flung, exploded, and in a moment the whole pearly-green surface of sea about the boat was alive with flapping fins and tails. Mullet flung themselves ashore, struggling and dying; mullet beat the shallow pools into foam, suddenly ceased, died, and floated motionless. The boat boy yelled, and leaped into the shallows, scooping and flinging spoil with both hands. All of us followed him. In five minutes a hundred and fifty gorgeous fish, silver, sapphire-tailed, were decorating the beach. It was the quickest fishing I had ever seen, familiar though I was with "Nobel bait"—which is forbidden, but used, over almost all the Pacific.

or two. But Harris did not notice. "I told you these seas was fair livin' with fish," he said triumphantly. "Pearl oysters too, but that's in deeper water. You can eat 'em, if you don't get no pearls. And all manners of crabs and eels and the like. The men that was wrecked off the *Columbia*, the ones that didn't stop 'ere, they told me they could put out their 'and, so to speak, and pull something out of a pool, any blessed time they chose. There's places in the hislands where fish is scarce, without no one knowin' why, and places like this, where it's a proper zoölogercal garden."

"Quite," said Jeems snubbingly. I gathered that all manner of reference to natural history matters, unless clothed in scientific language, appeared to him presumptuous and meriting rebuke. It seemed to me that this youth of twenty-something had already, in mind, ceased to grow; that he was for all practical purposes, sixty-odd years, as to brain—like many of his kind. And I wondered how he was going to

bridge the long gap of years, with his provision for the road already well-nigh done.

I must have been "fey," or something like it, that day. For I was conscious of a thought that groped about the blinder depths of consciousness, stupidly and confusedly saying: "Doesn't matter; he will not want it—long."

WELL! Being in love with Brush Island, I planned to make it mine as far as a man near penniless could do. Camp there—squat there; love it and have it all my own.

I didn't worry about Harris and his stories. Harris was a born wonder-monger. He knew the sea and the things of the sea; you could trust his word on all such matters—but when it came to tales of those who used the ocean, he simply could not help exaggerating. Therefore this tale of Brush Island nights made no impression on me; I planned to take up my residence at once. I did not even want to go back to the house and fetch anything. A boy could do that later. In the launch, there were provisions I could borrow; my clothes could wait; and as to camping, it was the dry season, and a hammock, slung among my beloved pines, would be all that heart could desire. Vaiti mostly carried a hammock stowed away in her boat; it was the only way of sleeping, if you did not want to berth right alongside the engine.

"Lend me the hammock and a mouthful of stores," I said, when we had done picking up the fish. "And leave me some fish when you go back. I'm going to stop."

She looked at me curiously. I can see her now, silhouetted against the merry blue-green of the shallows, a figure eternally one with winds and waters, kin to sea-creatures, as are all those of Island blood; her grace the grace of fishes and of birds, her anger the swift deadly anger of the shark, the sea-eagle; her love—

But Vaiti's love I did not know; there always had been mystery there. . . . . And was not that too like the loves of the deep sea: secret, strange, not spied upon or known?

"I lend you two tin meat, half tin tea, pound of bistick," she said curtly, breaking through the tinsel fabric of my dreams, as in truth she always did. "Hammock too. I think you damn' fool!" And she busied herself again with the mullet, dropping them two by two, in all their blue and pearly splendor, into the hold of the launch.

"I not 'top tonight," she continued. "This fiss, I salt 'em along Isle of Pines, feed my boys. Tomorrow I come back. Suppose you finding mullet like this, you finding everything."

"Why am I a fool—what do you mean?" I asked her. Nobody was listening. Against the jeweled shield of the outspread shallows, the figures of Harris, Jeems and the native blotted at long distances, were busy harvesting fish.

"Alliti" (this was Vaiti's name for Harris), "one big liar," she said, striking a mullet that still flapped, against a lump of coral. "Lie plenty—but not lie all the time."

"What, Vaiti! You believe in this bogey?"

"Along Atiu, they savvy all about spilit. This kind island very good place for spilit. You do what you like. All same, I think you damn' fool."

"Maybe," I agreed—rather flattered on the whole that she should take so much notice of me. "But anyhow I'm going to stop. I like the place, and I don't expect the spirits will bite me."

I FOUND, however, that my view was not shared by the rest of the party. Harris was quite determined to go back to Pine Island for the night, and Jeems, also, after an interval of indecision, made up his mind to return.

"Not that I credit for a moment any of these absurd stories," he was careful to explain. "But one can't collect in the dark, and as Mrs. Tempest" (the name sounded strange, but after all Vaiti was Tempest's wife) "is so kind as to offer to bring me out tomorrow morning again, I shall take advantage of her suggestion."

" 'E's stayin' with us," explained Harris. "Vaiti, she settled it that way when she run him out from Noumeer."

"I'll stop here," I repeated. "And if I find any blue pearls, I'll keep them for myself. Findings keepings, for all hands."

"You find none. Shalli got one, you wait a hundred year for another," commented Vaiti bitterly. I knew the reason she had—never spoken of, or discussed—for wanting to gather together as much money as possible, and I felt sorry. Undoubtedly, Simoni had transgressed island etiquette in getting Shalli to sell to him; undoubtedly, the blue pearl would have set her a good deal farther up the hill she was painfully climbing, if it had come to her.

But Vaiti repelled sympathy as the dark, jeweled sea-urchin of the coral reefs repels a touch—with a poisoned stab. If she were dying, she would have turned from kindly hands that smoothed her pillow.

THEY all went off, and I was alone with my island.

The more I saw of it, the more it pleased me. Night came quickly; while there was still a little light in the sky reflected rose and lemon in the lagoon, I slung my hammock from the lower branches of two great pines, a hundred feet high, and settled myself luxuriously, to smoke and dream. We of the islands—the people-who-stayed-too-long—at least eat our cake, if we don't have it; and dreams are the currants of the cake that has cost so much. . . . .

Morning came surprisingly soon, as it does to those who sleep outdoors. I had hardly thought of the bogey business, and so was not particularly amazed or gratified to find myself alive. But when Harris and the rest came over in the launch, they seemed extremely interested.

"I wouldn't 'a' done it for a thousand pounds," declared Harris, goggling at me, fish-eyed, as we all stood together on the beach, blown by an inspiriting sunrise wind.

"Then you'd have been a fool," I answered him, "for if you had you'd have been a thousand pounds richer today."

"And 'oo knows that I'd 'a' 'ad time so much as to get a proper 'ead on me with the thousand, before I 'ad no more use for drinks or 'eads either?" he demanded. "If you'll take my advice, you'll sleep on Pine tonight."

"What did you come over for, anyhow?" I asked with some impatience. I was feeling, that day, rather like a man who has had his honeymoon rudely interrupted.

"It appears," said Mr. Jeems, "that Mrs. Tempest has not abandoned the idea of finding more blue pearls—in the face of probability, as she herself admits. As for me, though I can't possibly help in such an absurd search, I can very well join the party, and collect."

"Get a move on," interrupted Vaiti. "I think Simoni maybe turn up today."

She drove us like cattle, that burning morning and afternoon—only cattle, so far as I have known them, have more sense than to splash all day long in lagoons and pools, half-swimming, half-diving, after shells. Brush Island is not rich in pearl shell; and big specimens, for the most part, are found in deep water. We did not get much of a harvest; still, nothing would satisfy her but that we should go on. The reef was extremely lively, especially in eels and all such wriggling life. Pearl shell was very scarce, and all of the black-lip kind.

"The man 'oo found the blue pearl of Dunk, 'e got it in a black-lip," said Harris. "If there's more, which I don't believe there is, it's 'ere we should get them."

Mr. Jeems, clad like the rest of us in rolled-up trousers only, worked as hard as anyone; but I am bound to confess that the *"Margaritifera"* interested him little. Something in the holes of the reefs had caught his attention, and he could hardly be detached from it to come and feed, at noon.

"Is it possible," he asked, sitting half naked on a rock, with a biscuit in one hand and a chunk of fried mullet in the other, "that the palolo worm inhabits these places?" He was almost trembling.

EVERYBODY answered together. We all knew about the palolo; it was a commonplace to us. Vaiti, Harris, and I alike, had spent many a November dawn, in years gone by, spooning the wonderful worm off the surface of a scarcely lighted sea; we were all bored with it long ago, and not at all keen on the squashy creature as an article of food. Mr. Jeems gathered from our replies that the reef under water was probably alive with palolo.

"When does it rise—what is the one day in the year?" asked Jeems, letting his biscuit drop into a pool, and staring.

Vaiti did a lightning sum in her head.

"Tomorrow," she said.

"I shall sleep here tonight," pronounced the man of science. "If I missed such a chance, I should never, never forgive myself. Nor," he added heavily, "would my university."

Nobody argued. Harris had doubtless said all he intended to say in the matter; Vaiti did not care what happened to anyone, and I did not believe there was any reason whatever why Jeems should not sleep on Brush. We did some more shell fishing, still without results, and were thinking of knocking off for the day, when Harris raised a shout.

"Have you found it?" cried Vaiti.

"I've found *'im,"* said Harris. "That's 'is boat comin' along beyond the reef. 'E's bound 'ere, right enough!"

I was the only one near Vaiti; I alone heard what she said, through tight-closed teeth. It appeared to me that the barometer, for Mr. Simoni, pointed to *Stormy*.

HE landed, a small, fattish fellow of East European race, in an embroidered shirt and a pair of short white trousers—patent shoes on his sockless feet. He had lips of sealing-wax red, and his eyelashes were so thick and long that they seemed to be made up. But you could have turned a flint ax, on the rest of his face.

Vaiti wasted no time. She went right up to him, and demanded:

"Where's my pearl?"

"You have some pearls to sell?" asked Simoni innocently. "I thought you had been selling them to that convict man away beyond Tontouta; perhaps he gave you a better price." And I realized what had escaped me before, that Simoni's action might have been double-edged.

"My pearl," repeated Vaiti, in a low dangerous tone. "Pearl my man Shalli find, what you steal."

"Don't be libelous before witnesses," advised Simoni smoothly. "I bought it."

"You got it with you?"

"I have got it. I'm going to get more." Simoni was as bold as brass, this fine breezy afternoon, in full sunlight, with several indifferent and presumably law-abiding persons standing around. Vaiti might have a habit of flinging knives, but she would scarcely—

She did not. She turned round with a splendid sweep and walked away, silent.

"Stormy. Much rain," I observed to myself.

"I fear," remarked Mr. Jeems, "you are on a bootless errand, Mr. ——, I did not catch your name. It is unscientific and absurd to look for blue pearls. They do not exist. If I saw an alleged blue pearl, I should know at once I was mistaken, and should simply—"

What he had been going to say I do not know. Simoni checked the stream of his eloquence by spitting in an unnecessarily scornful manner, quite close to Mr. Jeems' expensive boots. Then he walked away.

"Very bad-mannered person, curiously ignorant," was Jeems' comment. "Almost as ignorant as the people who believe that ghosts and bogeys haunt Brush Island—That's an interesting word, *bogey*, by the way. Curious analogy with *bug*, which has lost its original—"

"Mister," said Harris with emphasis. "Them people know more than you do, if you could only believe there's some one in the world which does. There's something on the hisland—something bad. If it didn't get Richardson, it'll get 'im yet. Them men, they went to sleep same as you or me, and woke up in the morning dead as mutton, all blue and swole up something chronic."

"Poisoned," said Mr. Jeems. "Tins opened and left too long."

"Not in one night, Mister. And tin poisonin' don't leave you blue and swole, with queer marks on you—marks like as if some one 'ad been stickin' pins in you!"

JEEMS raised his head at this, and seemed about to say something. But he thought better of it. I heard him say, as if to himself—"There aren't any in New Caledonia, Loyalties, Isle of Pines. Not possible." Then he opened one of his collecting tins, and busied himself with the contents. He had employed himself, while we were fruitlessly hunting for a thing about as easy to find as blue roses, in collecting the creatures that most interested himself, and a jammy, jellified mess they were, stored in tins of salt water. "I must decline," he had told Vaiti, again, "to look for an object that I know to be nonexistent. A man has his scientific conscience, dear lady; you really mustn't ask me to violate mine." Vaiti of the Islands, not used to being called "dear lady," looked at him inscrutably, and went on hunting. . . . .

"Well," said Simoni unpleasantly flushed with triumph, "you all looked all day and got nothing. No use for white people to try. This is native work. I am getting Shalli tomorrow, to come and find more for me. There's a big buyer in Noumea now; he wants a matched pair for earrings—he'll give good money—more than five francs." Simoni chuckled. I saw that he had come to spy on us; was well pleased over our disappointment. Simoni was one of those numerous folk to whom triumph is not triumph, unless spiced with the defeat and loss of others.

We all melted away from him; he was not pleasant company. He took his boat by and by, and went off to look in the mainland villages for diving natives.

The sun was low by now, and the lagoons about Brush Island were all one sheet of gold save where the wool-white reefs continually creamed and tumbled. Like

The plug was flung; it exploded, and in a moment the surface of the sea about the boat was alive with fins and tails.

a lover, I longed to be alone once more with my beauty, my island. I was unspeakably annoyed with Mr. Jeems for persisting in his idea of making a camp on the beach.

"You could sleep over at Pine," I told him. "Get up an hour before daybreak, run over here in the launch, and see the palolo rising just as well." But he would not have it so. "If the launch broke down —if I overslept," he said, "I should lose the chance of a lifetime." When the others were gone, he made his camp on the widest stretch of sand, lighting a fire, piling driftwood beside it, arranging his blankets, all with a sort of deftness that told me that he was no novice to outdoor life.

"Let him do as he likes," I thought, as I left him, and went to my hammock among the stately pines. I wanted to forget Jeems, and all about him, as soon as I could. And, being well out of sight and sound, it was not long before I had so forgotten; had drifted again into the dreams that Island dwellers know.

I didn't hurry to get up next morning; the palolo were nothing to me. It was not until I heard the distant *whit-whit* of a launch, that I tumbled out of my hammock in which I had slept so well, and strolled down towards the sand-beach. Sunrise was half an hour past; there were no traces of palolo left on the surface of the glittering water, save here and there a faint oily discoloration. The marvelous sea-worms had risen, as they rise but one day in the year, just before dawn, with the earliest rays of light; had burst and scattered their contents of eggs upon the water; had sunk, mere shards, to the depths once more, whither the eggs had quickly followed, to ripen a new generation, and like their parents, rise for one crowded hour of life, twelve moons later.

I wondered if Jeems had really witnessed the miracle. I could not see him anywhere about.

THEN—I did see him. And with a cry, I began running hard toward the place where the little scientist had camped the night before. He was still there. He would never rise to go away again.

I knew it before I reached him, bent over him and saw the strange blue color to his face, the staring unseeing eyes. He was lying in a stiff unnatural attitude, as if he had scarcely struggled before being overcome; as if the fate that overtook him, there on the beach, was as surprising as undoubtedly it had been terrible. I turned him over, looking for injuries. There were none, unless you could call some faint blue spots about neck, arms and ankles injuries. But he was certainly dead—"blue, and dead as mutton."

What did these symptoms point to? I was not learned enough to say. But it came upon me there, that Jeems had recognized Harris' description; had known it

pointed to something—Heaven knows what—and had, quite calmly, discredited it.

"Some of his scientific indoor ideas," I thought, unkindly perhaps. "I suppose his books contradicted Harris, and he'd rather have died than—" There I broke off, for the little man, true to his peculiar conscience, *had* died, rather than believe what he thought to be "unscientific."

There have been less worthy martyrs.

SIMONI, of course, was not in Vaiti's launch; she would have seen him drown first. Harris had come along; and the news I had to offer seemed to give him a sort of melancholy pleasure, after the first shock was past.

"W'erever 'e's gone to now, 'e knows I was tellin' the bloomin' truth," commented the elderly sailor. Vaiti was grave. I cannot pretend that sorrow for the violent end of a man she scarcely knew, and had not liked, weighed her down—but obviously she was thinking hard, and the blue pearl, I would have wagered, was not very far from her thoughts.

She looked at the pitiful thing that had been Mr. Jeems, examined it, as I had done, and like myself, came to no conclusions—or if she did, left them unmentioned. She only said—"We have to take him 'long Noumea, make a report. Go tomorrow."

"Why not today?" I asked, thoughts of climate obtruding themselves unpleasantly. The Isle of Pines and its dependencies are just within the tropics. And in the tropic world, one buries soon.

"Tomorrow," was all the reply I got. Later she vouchsafed: "You an' me, maybe, we 'top here tonight."

The vainest man in the world could not have mistaken her.

"Thank you, Vaiti," I said. "I'll be glad to help you any way I can."

MIDDAY brought Simoni back again, alone and rather cross. It seemed that the natives of the Isle of Pines did not like Brush Island, or did not like him; either way, they had refused to do any diving. Shalli had been found, but when questioned, declared that the blue pearl was the only one he had ever seen or heard of, and he wasn't going to waste time looking for more. The New Caledonian inertia seemed to have taken hold of him; dynamite would not have roused Shalli to work, just now.

"You seem to have been right when you said it was no good looking," I reminded Vaiti—somewhat anxious lest she should start that abominable shell-hunting business again. But she had no such intention. Simoni was her quarry today. I didn't know what plan she had in mind; that she had one, I was convinced. She brought him over to poor Jeems, where the late man of science lay on the sand, covered by a boat-sail. She insisted on lifting the sail, and showing the discolored face. Simoni shied away like a scared horse.

"Nothing to me," he declared, turning a hideous yellow. "Come away. I wan' to go back to Noumea!"

IT was late in the afternoon—late and lonely looking. There wasn't a keel on the empty, gilded sea as far as eye could reach, save Vaiti's long black launch, and Simoni's cutter, with the cranky little engine. He had moored the latter within the reef; the tide was swinging it about a bit, but it seemed safe enough. Vaiti's boat-boy had gone to look at it a few minutes before.

"I want to go—get my boat—" Simoni was beginning, when suddenly he stopped and let out a horse-like screech. "My boat!" he cried. "She's adrift!"

She was, and gliding lightheartedly out through the nearest reef passage, as if she had been alive. "Get her, get her!" screamed Simoni, dancing in his patent pumps. "I give reward—salvage—I want my boat!"

Vaiti had lit one of her long black cigars and was smoking it, very much at her ease. I don't know what made me think of Kipling's line:

"But it never really mattered, till the English grew polite."

Vaiti was half English, at any rate.

"You wan' to sleep here tonight?" she asked him.

"My God, no!" said Simoni shrilly. "If I sleep, I die—I die blue and swelled, like *him*." He seemed to shake all over at the thought.

"What you going to do, then?" she asked him, pausing to draw at her cigar. The cutter had stopped, was apparently aground on a sandy shoal.

"You take me in your boat to get mine," he answered hardily.

"Yes, tomorrow," replied Vaiti. "Tomorrow I going to Noumea, take this dead man, tell the gendarmes. I take you then.

To my relief, I saw her, a pale upright figure, standing motionless near the edge of the bush.

Tonight, we all stopping along this islan'. If you don't like it, you swim after your boat."

"I can't swim. You bring me in your launch," he cried, shaking his hands about violently.

"What you pay me, suppose I take you Isle of Pines, leave you there for tonight?"

"Five hundred francs!" cried Simoni, desperately.

"I don't want five hundred francs. I want one pearl. One blue pearl."

"I'll see you drowned first, you black witch!"

"All right," was Vaiti's comment. She made a sign to the boat-boy. Instantly he threw the lever over, and the engine began to chatter.

UNTIL he saw the launch was really going, Simoni stood it out; then he gave in.

"Some day I think I'll kill you," he said, with an unpleasant calm that I liked less than his fury. "Put me aboard my boat, and I'll give it." It occurred to me just then that Simoni was in the wrong business. He would certainly have made a fortune in "the pictures," if he could register hate and revenge, to order, as he was doing now.

Not until the cutter had been rescued, and run up to the beach—not until he was aboard, with the engine going (but Vaiti keeping a sharp look-out on the starting lever)—did he pull out of his shirt a tiny, significant packet. I will allow that my breath came short when I saw it. A blue pearl! I had never seen one, though I knew enough of the great Pacific's infinite possibilities not to deny that such things might exist.

There was rather a nasty look on Simoni's face as he pulled the packet out, loss and triumph oddly mingled. I understood, and so did Vaiti, when he tossed down on the glittering sand a sphere of wonderful color, blue as the bodies of the little sapphire reef-fish, but—

Nobody had said anything about size. Somehow, we had all assumed that the pearl was a big one, large as a pea, perhaps. The gem that Simoni threw upon the sand was no larger than the pearls you see in single-stone cheap rings. Its color no doubt gave it value, but otherwise it was not in any way remarkable. I guessed it to be worth about fifty pounds—a sum

that Simoni would not lose more happily than some of his ancestors had lost teeth to tyrannical barons; but nothing much to Vaiti's more liberal spirit.

I believe he was reasonably satisfied, as he steered the cutter out of the reef passage, and made for Noumea, deprived of his pearl, but pleased, at least, by Vaiti's probable disappointment. Not that she said anything about it. She picked up the pearl, looked at it closely, and dropped it into a tiny bag she wore round her neck, underneath her dress. Then she told me what her plans were.

She meant to leave the corpse of Mr. Jeems just where it was, for the night, and to camp alongside it, herself, lighting a good fire for company. I was to remain in the pine grove, ready in case of need.

Anyone who did not know Vaiti, might have put down this arrangement to modesty. She was modest enough, but not in that way. She would have slept alongside me on the sand, had she so wished, without turning a hair. I guessed that the separation was due more to her desire to keep all the credit of discovery to herself, than to anything else. It seemed to me a risky vanity in this case, and I besought her to let me at least remain walking up and down on the beach, as sentry. But she shook her head.

"Suppose there's something," she said. "It wont come, when somebody looking. You stop along bush."

I made up my mind that I would not do that, at any rate. When night came, I took my blanket down to the beach, in the dark, and camped a good way off from Vaiti; near enough, however, to see the heartening glow of her fire, and to wonder, a little, why she insisted on having one. It was not very like her. . . . .

I cannot yet say how I fell asleep.

It had been my fixed intention to remain awake all night; perhaps that was the reason. Nothing is more likely to make one feel sleepy, than the idea that one must not sleep—just as nothing is more likely to make one laugh, than the certainty that it would be profane, or ill-mannered, to do so. At all events, after an hour or two spent agreeably enough, lying on the firm sand with my blanket folded under to keep off chill, listening to the combing of the reefs far out at sea, watching great Sirius set where the sun had gone down, and the Cross lean lower and lower, all the world seemed to melt softly, imperceptibly away, and the long, soft rumor of the reef was still. . . . .

In my dreams, by and by, the man Jeems came to me. I did not want him to come; he was so cold, so very dead. But I temporized. "One mustn't be rude," I thought. "One can't refuse to shake hands." I tried to drop his hand when I had done with it. It would not be dropped, I dreamed; it slid through mine, endlessly, slimily, very wet and cold.

Then I woke up. There was a little moon. I think that saved me—that, and the fact that I had spent my life among wild people and wild lands. For I saw in an instant that to move was death.

THERE was a snake pouring through my fingers, like a stream of chilly treacle. There was a snake passing across my neck as I lay. There was one lying full length beside me, touching me. There were two on the blanket, coiled up, quiescent, just where I was bound to lean my elbow when I rose. On the stretch of clean ivory sand that sloped away from my camp, I could see three or four more snakes, gliding slowly up from the edges of the sea. They were all the same kind, black-and-white banded; I knew them for sea-snakes, harmless if not attacked, but if trodden on, rolled on, or touched urgently, as certain to bite—and poisonous as almost no land snake is poisonous.

"My God!" I thought. "Has Vaiti been sleeping among all these? And if I get killed, how can I help her?" For I saw at once that to move would be impossible; my only chance lay in keeping perfectly quiet until daylight. I had heard of reefs, islands, where the sea-snakes were wont to come ashore in numbers during the dark; but it had never occurred to me that Brush might be one. I suppose I was misled—as others were—by the well-known fact that New Caledonia and its dependent islands, have, strange to say, no land-snakes whatever.

I could see Vaiti's fire from where I lay; I strained my eyes, under the rising moon, to make out any trace of her figure. At first I thought there was nothing visible; then, to my unspeakable relief, I saw her in the distance, a pale upright figure, standing motionless near the edge of the bush. I did not dare to shout, but I ventured a shrill whistle. She heard it at once, and turned round.

I think she must have guessed the state

of affairs at once, for instead of coming instantly, she waited to take a burning brand out of her fire, and to gather an armful of dry fallen sticks. Bringing these with her, she trod quickly along the firm edges of the sand, to the place where I was lying, immovable. She gave me but half a glance, before she laid down the sticks, and thrust the burning brand right into them. They made a brisk fire, in a minute or two; and then she got more wood, and heaped it up. "Keep still," she warned me. "When they see the fire, they will come to it."

I suppose it was not many minutes before the last of the snakes removed its death-cold body from my limbs, and glided away. But when they were gone, I felt as if I had been lying, motionless, expectant of fatal bites, for at least a week.

"Get up," said Vaiti. The little wind that comes before dawn was blowing her white Island robe about her, and spreading her short curls out like seaweed seen in water. Tall, splendid, with a burning branch held in her hand, she looked like some pre-historic Druidess, some priestess of a savage, forgotten faith. And as usual, her speech destroyed the illusion.

"I think you damn' fool, deserve all you get! Come on."

She stalked away with the light.

I FOLLOWED her, anxious to see how she had fared. The marks of her slight bare feet on the edge of the forest showed me that she had been standing there, concealed, all night. Beside the silent, covered figure of Mr. Jeems the fire burned high. And round about the fire, gliding hideously over the corpse, were snakes, snakes, and snakes—I could not count how many. All black and white, all from the sea, all drawn to the light as moths are drawn to a lamp, and all armed with the deadly poison that had slain the shipwrecked sailors, years ago, slain Jeems last night, and just missed slaying myself an hour ago.

I don't mind admitting that the very hideousness of the sight fascinated me. I stood staring, until the sunrise wind got up clear and strong, blowing the night away; until the dawn came swiftly and the hideous, cruel creatures, fearing day, began to slip and glide toward their natural element. They were all gone before the first rays broke on the lagoon. I drew a breath of relief.

"Plenty stop," said Vaiti coolly, taking a long stick and turning over the stones of the shore. Under every third or fourth stone a checked body showed, and a stream of snake poured itself swiftly out of sight.

"Lord," I said, "the place is made of them!"

Vaiti did not reply. She was looking at something on the sand—something that looked as if it had been carelessly thrown there, tossed away. It lay in the middle of an open stretch, and it seemed to have rolled down from the higher level of the beach. I think it had been partly covered, until our feet kicked away the sand. It was round and bright, and in the rising sun, shone marvelously blue.

WE both realized at the same moment what it was, but Vaiti reached it first though our heads knocked together over it, where it lay. She stood erect, held up the lovely thing to the new sunlight, and laughed.

"Blue pearl—big one!" she cried. It was as big as the top of an ordinary typewriter key; it was round as a bead, and the luster of it, something between opal and sapphire, was a thing to dream of.

"All the books say there isn't such a thing," I remarked, staring, "but there's more things in the sea than ever came out of it." Then suddenly I realized what Mr. Jeems had done, and I cried out: "Why, this man found it, didn't believe it was a pearl, and threw it away!"

It was even so. The pearl lay where it could not have lain, unless some one had first brought it up from the reef, and then tossed it carelessly away again. And Jeems, who had died for his scientific conscience, had, just before dying, thrown away a fortune for the very same cause!

Do you know, I felt a certain reverence for the poor little beggar, lying there in the sunrise that he would never see! I realized that Jeems was made of finer stuff than many I had known; I wondered what he might have done, if only—

Well, *ifs* are cold comfort. There was a pretty big "*if*" hanging on to my island by now—my island that wasn't going to be mine, after all; nor yours, for Brush Island is true, but the serpents are true also!

If little Jeems was not quite right, he was very nearly so. Nobody, in spite of diligent search, has found a blue pearl, large or small, about the Isle of Pines again. And I do not think that any will ever be found.

All the Brave Rifles

An absorbing romance of Texas and the struggle for freedom in the days of Davy Crockett, Colonel Bowie and Sam Houston.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"LOOK here, Lon—and you, Abel. This is Texas."

Will Summers gave the map a final smoothing and turned to watch the faces of his two friends, Abel Roundtree and Lon Bullard—Tennessee pioneers all, in President Jackson's time. But young Summers had trouble in converting his friends to his idea of adventuring to the still newer land of Texas, whither his brother Jim had gone after his marriage. He ran into trouble, too, of a more violent kind, for this was election time. A strong Jackson man, Summers amicably opposed Davy Crockett, whom he had defeated in a rifle-shooting contest. It was shortly after this that the political trickery of one of his own party, named Crenshaw, caused Summers to strike the man, and a duel followed. Given choice of terms, Summers chose rifles, each to have one shot when he met his enemy, whom he was to seek out at night in a certain grove. Crenshaw, losing his nerve, fired too soon, and fled.

Temporarily giving over his Texas scheme, Summers went to Washington and studied law in the office of Major Langstone. There he made the acquaintance of a young doctor, Jefferson Buell, and fell in love with his sister Caroline, even as Jefferson had fallen in love with Caroline's friend Sally Ransome. It was shortly after Summers' admission to the bar that he received a letter from his sister-in-law Mary, —Jim's wife,—with the bitter news that her husband had been murdered and she dispossessed of their land by the Mexicans. And as he was packing to leave, Jefferson Buell burst in with the news that Sally Ransome was dead, betrayed by a handsome scoundrel named Gant, who had fled to Texas. *(The story continues in detail:)*

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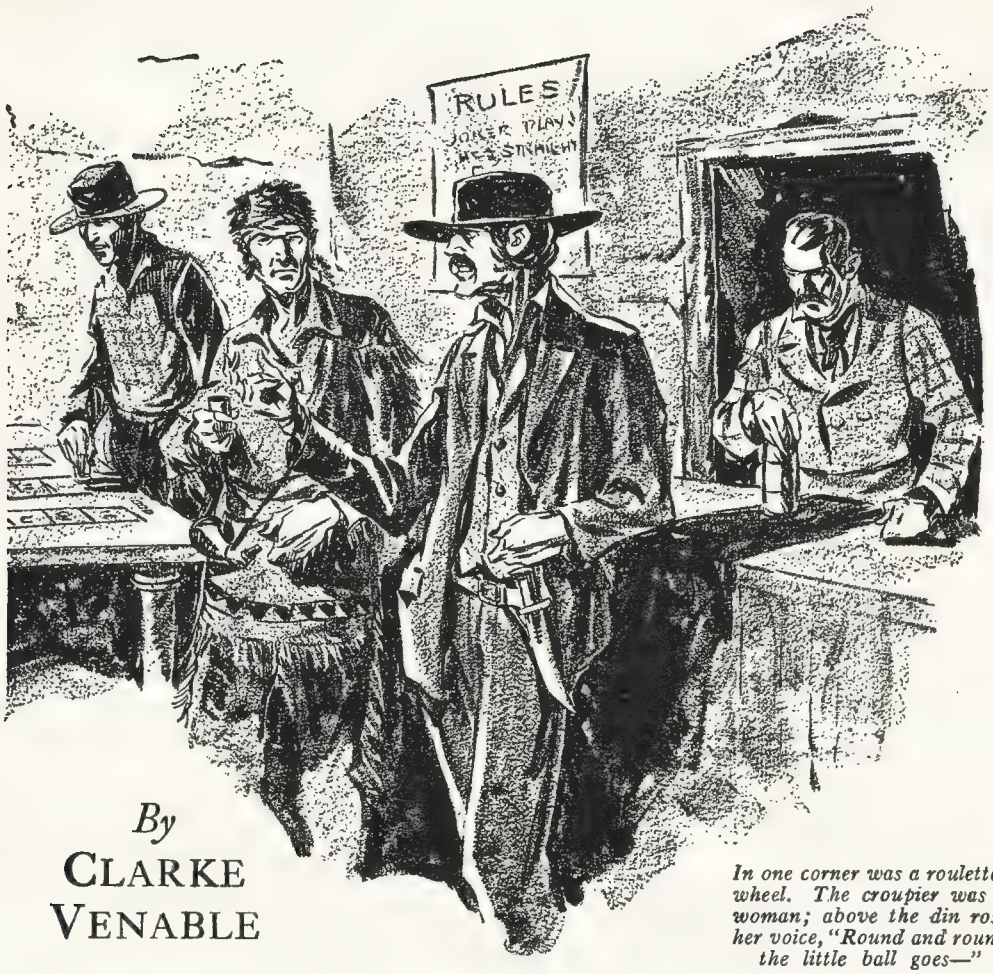


In one corner was a roulette-wheel. The croupier was a woman; above the din rose her voice, "Round and round the little ball goes—"

By
CLARKE
VENABLE

IN the soft dusk of a late March evening four men sat around a small campfire at the edge of the timber flanking the Sabine River. Out where the trees met the grass land four picketed horses munched hungrily in the lush grass. Three of the men were devouring the last strips of venison which they had broiled over the coals. The fourth man, suffering from a fever, sat propped against a tree, holding a wet handkerchief to his brow. His companions ate in silence, to the last morsel, and licked the juices from their fingers.

"There!" Abel Roundtree said with a sighing finality as he leaned back against his saddle, "that's that! I could eat more without hurtin'. I'd orter left the grease on my fingers fer breakfast. What'll we do fer breakfast, Will?"

"We can get a turkey when the moon comes up," Summers answered. "There's bound to be a roost along the river here. Jeff and I will go upstream and you go down. We are out of meal and nearly everything else, but meat is better than nothing. I guess we can hold over until tomorrow night."

"How much farther is it to Nacogdoches, Will?" Bullard asked, lifting himself up on his elbow. "I'm burning up with this blasted fever, and those pills Doc gave me make me sicker than ever."

"According to the map it is about fifty miles," Summers told him. "We can make it by tomorrow night if we can locate the ferry in the morning. I don't know where we got off the trail. We'd been better off if we had swung south at Jonesborough and picked up the Old Spanish Road at Natchitoches. That's the main road to Nacogdoches."

"Them's the damnedest names!" Abel

commented. "I never know which one you're talkin' about. But if there's a ferry south of here, I motion we head fer it."

"We will go north a few miles first," Summers said. "We should come to Gaines' ferry soon."

"I don't care whose ferry 'tis, jes' so it's a ferry," Abel answered. "I'm tired of swimmin' rivers and wadin' swamps. I've had these buckskin britches of mine wet and dry so many times in the last month that I can't stoop over any more without first settin' down in the water to take out the shrink. I'll be mighty glad when we git where we're goin'. That's Texas right acrost the river, aint it?"

"Yes."

"Thank God! I hope you'll be satisfied then. I reckon we'll stay in that funny-soundin' town a right smart time, Will?"

"I don't know. That depends."

"It don't depend as far as I'm concerned —not by a jugful. Old Pete has wore his hoofs off plumb up to the fetlocks—and I'm ailin'. And Lon here is sicker'n a hound pup that has jumped a polecat. But when I git to one or t'other place, that's where I stop. I'd as soon be partnered with a couple of Indians as you and Doc. You both act like yore tongues was sore, and you 'pear to be as mad as two wet hens. I like *talk*."

Silence fell. Bullard leaned farther back against the tree. Summers and Jefferson Buell sat staring into the fire.

"I like talk!" Abel repeated.

"Well, talk!" Summers answered curtly.

ABEL spat into the fire, arose slowly and walked out to the edge of the woods to repicket his horse. He could at least talk to Pete. His voice, lifted in soliloquy for the benefit of all, could be heard at the campfire. Along the weary miles they had come, Abel often told his horse what he thought of things. As a rule he expressed his opinions in a voice strong enough to be heard by all—if they cared to listen.

"Pete," he now addressed his horse, "you and me would been better off if we had stayed at home. I'm sorry fer you, seein' you didn't exercise no free will in the matter. It's all my fault. Will talked me into it, but you know how Will is that-a-way, when he gits a notion in his head. I'd orter knowed better than to give up Tennessee fer Texas. From what I can learn from the all-fired few folks we've run acrost in the last four-five days, hell's a-stewin' over in Texas, and the lid's about to blow off. I can't make heads ner tails of it, but if trouble starts, that fool Summers'll get right in the middle of it. And it's my bounden duty to stay with him and see he don't git hurt. I can't help that now, Pete, but I'm downright sorry fer you."

Throughout the monologue Pete had been far more interested in grass than in conversation, but at this point he lifted his head, bent his ears forward and whinnied softly. Summers' horse, Hard Cash, also lifted his head.

Abel turned quickly and looked south. A lone horseman, indistinct in the dusk, came galloping along the edge of the trees. Abel retreated to the campfire, where he had left his rifle.

"Somebody's comin'," he announced.

"Hello!" A cheery, deep voice sounded just beyond the line where the firelight met the darkness. "Got room and bed for a guest?"

"There's room a-plenty, God knows!" Abel answered. " 'Light, stranger."

A tall, dark man came striding into the circle of firelight. His face was covered by a stubble of whiskers several days old. A large, dilapidated soft hat, shading his eyes, gave him a most forbidding appearance. But this appearance changed instantly when he came close enough for the firelight to find his soft eyes. His lips parted in a smile of friendship.

"My name is Bowie," he said, extending his hand to Summers. His voice had a rich and pronounced Southern accent.

Summers shook hands warmly. "I am glad to know you, sir. My name is Summers. This is Abel Roundtree. . . . . And this is Dr. Buell, from Washington. That is Mr. Bullard there against the tree. He has ridden with a fever all day."

"Are you from Washington, Texas?" Bowie asked as he shook hands with Jefferson Buell.

"Oh, no! Washington, D. C."

"Ah! I thought not from Texas—I thought I knew near every man, woman and child in Texas. I'm glad to see you here, sir. We have need of doctors. You are headed for Texas?"

"Yes sir."

"Where are you going to locate?"

"Why—er—"

"We missed the trail," Summers broke in irrelevantly. "Isn't there a ferry near here? Gaines'?"

"Yes—about two miles above. I was

"Hello!" said a deep voice. "Got room and bed for a guest?" "There's room a-plenty, God knows!" Abel answered.

making for there tonight, but if you are riding on in the morning, I'll throw in with you. You are going as far as Nacogdoches, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am sorry we can't offer you food, but we just finished our last scrap."

"You are not the first to reach Texas empty-handed," Bowie laughed. "I have a few things in my saddle-bags—if I may use your fire."

"Of course."

As Bowie went back to picket his horse and get his saddle-bags, Summers turned to the others and said in a low voice:

"Let him do the talking. Abel, try keeping quiet for once."

"That's all I have done since I started on this trip," Abel retorted. "Why should I keep quiet when I meet somebody with enough sense to say somethin'? You'd think I was runnin' from a murder."

"You may run into one—if you talk too much," Summers answered significantly. "Try listening."

Bowie came back, carrying his saddle and bags. A single blanket was rolled tightly and tied across the cantle. In a few minutes he had a strip of meat broiling over the coals. It was a simple meal. Evidently he too was traveling light.

"I WAS lucky to fall in with you," Bowie said at last. "The more the merrier, in this part of country—especially between here and Nacogdoches. It's filled up with robbers, pirates, filibusterers and lawless Mexicans and whites. You can get your throat slit for a dollar."

Abel sucked in his breath sharply. "Jes' what I told you, Will. No law and no order and the whole country aint worth a bawbee."

"You are wrong there," Bowie responded. "It is the richest country on earth. That's why it has fetched the scoundrels here as well as the good settlers." He turned to Summers. "You said your name was Summers?"

"Yes sir."

"I wonder if you are any kin to the Jim Summers that lived east of Nacogdoches in the old Edwards colony?"

"He was my brother. You knew him?"

"Law, yes! I know most all of 'em, I reckon."

"You know how he was killed?"

"Only what I hear. It was in a scrap over his title. Land titles have been in a mighty bad mess in the Edwards colony. About the time a fellow gets everything all cleared up, along comes some Mexican with a shyster lawyer and claims he was an original holder or shows title that has been forged. That's what happened to your brother. According to what I hear, a lawyer in Nacogdoches, working hand in glove with the land agent, fixed up a title for a Mexican that took in nearly all of your brother's land. The idea was for the Mexican to live on it a little while and then sell it to this lawyer for a few dollars. That way the lawyer could get quite a passel of land. It seems they went down to oust your brother, and he met 'em with a rifle. They left. But two or three days later, when he was out chopping wood, some one shot him from cover. No one knows who it was. The day after the funeral the Mexican with the forged title came back with an order from the alcalde ordering the widow to vacate. Of course, a woman couldn't meet them with a rifle. A Mexican knows who to jump on."

AT the end of the recital, sympathy for Summers imposed a long silence on the listeners. Abel broke the spell.

"So, that's the kind of land you've been braggin' up to us, is it, Will? I could have got into trouble like that closter t'home."

Summers ignored him. "Have you seen his widow?" he asked Bowie.

"No. She was in Nacogdoches for a while with some friends, but I understand she took her children and went down to San Felipe to get Three-legged Willie to help her. He's the alcalde at San Felipe."

"Is she there now?"

"I don't know, but I'm headed for there."

"So am I," Summers said with quick decision. "I'll ride along with you."

"That's fine. We can be there in——"

"Now, Will," Abel interrupted, "you know Lon's sicker'n hell—and I'm ailin'. Course I can wiggle along, but we've got to give Lon a rest."

Bowie, not realizing the seriousness of Lon's fever, said:

"I have to stay over in Nacogdoches for a day. That will give you a rest."

"I'm afraid that wont be long enough for Lon," Summers said, "but we can leave him there in Dr. Buell's care. Then Mr. Roundtree and I will ride on with you. By the way, Mr. Bowie," he added, "do you know the man who forged the title to my brother's land?"

"Well, of course I couldn't swear who forged it, but I know who holds the land now."

"Who?"

"A fat little lawyer from your own State. His name's Crenshaw, I believe. He's down in Washington, Texas, now. Things got too hot for him in Nacogdoches and he moved on."

Abel shifted his position and started to speak. Summers gave him a black look.

"Sure," Abel completed, "we'll ride on down with you, Mr. Bowie. I've been achin' to see that country down around Washington."

CHAPTER XI

NACOGDOCHES offered many allurements to the weary traveler moving westward. Not the least of these was the fact that it was a resting-place. Trails from all directions intersected at Nacogdoches. Men from distant places met here, lingered awhile in the languorous sunshine, gathered in the gambling-halls to try their fortunes, lingered over the bars with tales of adventure, talked of hardships and dreamed of plenty, or met in the wagon-yards and formed little companies for further wanderings. Here came men who fomented war and men who pleaded for peace. In Teal's Tavern, a famous old hostelry, had been hatched plot and counter-plot. Here Houston had come, headed westward to Bexar on some mysterious mission, and here, upon his return, he had been asked to become a citizen. A man of keen vision, it was in old Nacogdoches that he first saw the bright star of Texas rising.

The early Spanish settlers, with a fine eye for climate and the things that make life tolerable, had established the town as a military post. As the years rolled on, and they found nothing about which to be scrupulously military, they built a church, comfortable homes, encouraged trade, and settled themselves to the peaceful business of living as elegantly as small labor would warrant.

In time American adventurers and colonists, tiring of the westward trek, settled here. Only men of purpose, or those who held life lightly, rode on. There were too many hazards westward for any save the dauntless. Many of the Mexicans were unfriendly, and roving bands of border ruffians made life miserable and unsafe for any group of travelers appreciably less numerous than their own. The country to the east, across the Redlands, was wild enough, and free enough, but to the west and southwest, across the limitless prairie, was a land where every man who entered it lived or died, profited or starved, each as was his merit.

The town was a magnet and a melting pot. Whoever stayed too long found it difficult to leave. The sunshine, the soft nights, the wind that came out of the south at evening, the liquid music of stringed instruments strummed passionately under a moon so close that it seemed held aloft by the belfry on the old mission, the sound of voices along the leaf-dappled walks under the trees—these things entered the hearts of men and stayed their wanderings.

HERE, late one March evening, came riding James Bowie with a little cavalcade of four newcomers from the States. As they had ridden throughout the long day, so they entered the town, Bowie and Summers leading, Buell riding alongside the sick and feverish Bullard, while Roundtree brought up the rear, talking to himself or singing tuneless snatches from old songs.

"That's the old Stone Fort over yonder," Bowie said, pointing out a structure none too warlike in appearance. "The Mexican Government kept a garrison there till the citizens kicked them out."

Summers nodded without comment. During the day's ride he had learned that Bowie selected his own subjects of conversation. When Summers asked questions concerning the possibility of revolution, Jim Bowie looked his thoughts but kept his tongue. He was particularly silent concerning his reason for being beyond the Sabine, but at the ferry Summers had heard him talking in low tones with the ferryman and gathered that he had been to Natchitoches on some mission. Doubtless Bowie was working in the cause of independence and was too shrewd to put his head in a noose by talking too freely with strangers.

"You will be asked a heap of questions here," Bowie said as they clattered into the street leading to Teal's Tavern. "This town has been divided against itself ever since the Government began breaking the provisions of the Constitution of 1824. You'll hear talk on both sides, and they'll try to find out which side you are on."

"You haven't," Summers countered.

Bowie chuckled. "Shucks! I don't have to. You've come here looking for trouble, or I miss my guess. Well, you'll find it 'fore the year's out, or I miss another guess. If you want to catch up with the skunk that shot your brother, I advise you to keep a still tongue around here. Wouldn't Winters be as good a name as Summers—for a spell?"

Summers looked at him gratefully.

"Yes," he answered, "and thank you for the hint. I was just going to ask you to guard your tongue."

Again Bowie chuckled. "Mr. Winters, if I ever started talking, I'd get half the men in Texas shot before sundown!"

At the hitch-rack in front of the inn they dismounted stiffly. A negro boy took the horses and led them around into the stableyard behind the tavern. Half a dozen men greeted Bowie warmly and extended welcome to every member of the little cavalcade. Whoever rode with James Bowie was welcome in Nacogdoches.

The moment they entered the tavern, Lon and Abel made a rush for the bar, followed by Buell.

"The sick man knows something about medicine," Bowie commented to Summers. "Have a drink?"

"No, thanks. You join them."

Summers walked across the big room to the crude desk at the far end. The attendant was bald, florid, and beaming with inquisitive eagerness.

"You're welcome, stranger," he said. "My name's Crews. Baldy, they call me. What might your name be?"

"How do you do, Mr. Crews," Summers said evasively. "Can you accommodate my party?"

"Shore. And might I ask where you're from?"

Summers turned and looked across to the bar where Abel stood holding aloft a glass as he voiced a loud toast in appreciation of the splendors and glories of Tennessee.

Summers turned to Crews with a faint smile. "I hear Mr. Roundtree is from Tennessee—perhaps that is as good as any."

The man started to ask another question but saw that Summers' smile had vanished.

"Shore," he said quickly. "Tennessee's fine. A sight of folks come here from there. Have you et yet, Mr.—er—Mr.——"

"No—nor recently. One of my friends is sick. He would like to have a room to himself, if that can be arranged."

"Shore can, though we usually bundle 'em in thicker than that. Two to the bed and more if necessary. Which one is sick?"

"The one in the brown beaver."

"Him?" Crews was skeptical. "He drinks hearty."

"He does everything hearty. But he has a fever."

"A fever? Say, now! If he's got a fever, you'd better be doin' somethin' about it. Come acrost Arkansas Territory?"

"Yes."

"That's it! It's the bile fever, shore as shootin'! You ketch it over in the swamps and canebrakes. But you've come to a good place. This town is healthier than all the rest of Texas thrown together. If a man dies here 'fore he's a hundred, it's because he's had an accident. A man here don't begin to have children's diseases until he's well past sixty. And there's a woman here who's a right smart hand at nursin' the bile fever if you aint too particular about her past. She's pulled through many a one. But,"—he looked around and bent nearer,—"she runs the roulette-wheel here, and she aint got much of a reputation. You don't want to ask too many questions."

"I don't ask questions," Summers answered pointedly. "We have no need of a nurse. There is a doctor in our party."

"Makes no difference! Red Ruth's better'n he is, if he hasn't had experience with the bile fever. She's always called in. You better get him to bed and let me send her to his room with some broth or something."

"Thank you, that would be fine. But I know my friend. He wont give up until he has to be carried. Besides, he's afraid of women. If he has strength enough to drink, I think he can still sit up to eat. All we ask is a chance."

CREWS took the hint and hustled off to the kitchen. Twenty minutes later the five hungry men were seated at a dinner which Abel declared was a great deal better than he ever expected to find in Texas.

After supper Bullard went to his room and to bed, promising to take two more of the large pills which Jeff had given him. But from the sly wink which he gave Abel, Summers knew that Lon would fight the fever with the strength of his body rather than with pills.

Summers, Buell, Abel and Bowie strolled into the crowded lobby. A dozen tables were filled with men playing cards. Over in one corner a roulette-wheel was receiving a heavy play. The croupier was a woman; and above the din of the crowded room rose her voice, intoning the time-worn ritual: "Round and round the little ball goes—"

Abel joined the crowd pressing around the wheel. Bowie passed over to the bar to talk with an old acquaintance. Summers and Buell took chairs and sat watching the throng that milled back and forth between the tables, the wheel and the bar. There were several women in the crowd. One of them was trying to drag a drunken plainsman away from a table where they were playing Old Sledge. From a dance-hall directly across the street came the sound of a rasping violin and the raucous voice of the caller: "Ladies to the center and gents to the wall. . . . . Now, gents to the center and balance all. . . . ." Some one, with mighty hands, was beating juba.

"Quite a lively town," Jeff said to Summers. "Just look at the types. See that Mexican playing at the wheel? I've been watching him. He's a handsome cuss."

The man indicated was dressed in the height of Spanish fashion. Lace cuffs on his sleeves increased the femininity of his small, artistic hands, but there was masculine strength to his shoulders. He played easily, smilingly, and with seeming unconcern. He won more often than the other players, and when he lost, he waved the stakes away with a bantering laugh.

BOWIE had come back from the bar and stood at Summers' side, watching the games with quiet interest.

"Who is that man?" Summers asked him, indicating with a nod the flashily dressed Mexican.

"Señor Francisco Cortina," Bowie answered in a low voice.

"Rather careless with his money," Buell said.

Bowie edged nearer. "Yes, he is careless with it because he never earned an honest dollar in his life. He is not playing at that game for money, but for what he can hear. He claims he is a Republican, but he does this when he is with Republicans. He's a sly fox—blows hot and cold. If you ask

"I wonder if you know a Texan named Gant," said Summers. Bowie wheeled in his saddle; his hand sought his knife.

me, he is an agent of Santa Anna's. The Government is anxious to keep the department of Nacogdoches in the peace-party, and Cortina's ears are large."

"Just who is the war-party, Mr. Bowie?" Buell asked.

Bowie glanced around furtively. It was evident that he was embarrassed by Buell's none-too-guarded question. Before he could frame an answer, a woman's voice caused Buell and Summers to turn their chairs. It was the woman who a few minutes before had been acting as croupier at the wheel.

"Bowie will not answer that," the woman said, "but I will. Sam Houston is the war-party."

"You talk nonsense!" Bowie rebuked her. "Get on back to your wheel and keep your tongue out of politics."

Summers kept his eyes on her. She was a big, strong woman, with a type of mature beauty that had the appearance of permanency. She was somewhere near thirty—a woman who had followed the trails of men and loved none. But her soft voice and manner of speaking marked her as one who had been schooled in the finer graces. Her hair was red, her features well chiseled, and there was a certain quality of character in her face.

"Why do you say Houston is the war party?" Buell asked her.

Bowie, growling, moved away.

"Because it is the truth," the woman answered.

"Sometimes the truth gets one into trouble," Summers cautioned.

The woman laughed tauntingly. "Imagine Red Ruth worrying about troubles! I am the one person in Nacogdoches who is not afraid to speak the truth."

"What makes you say Houston is the war-party?" Buell repeated his question.

"I know him, sir. He passed through here two years ago on some strange mission to Bexar. Some say he was sent by Jackson to form a treaty with the Indians. Others hold that he was trying to incite the Cherokees to open hostility."

"And what do you say, madam?"

"Would anyone be interested in what Red Ruth has to say? But I have been here at Teal's several years, and I have seen and heard a great deal. Many a plot has been hatched under this roof. Houston came here, and he won over many of the people. They asked him to become a citizen. When he returned from Bexar he accepted the invitation and took up residence here for a while."

"And wasn't he peaceful enough?" Summers challenged. "Have you forgotten that he was chairman of the constitutional convention at San Felipe?"

"No, nor have I forgotten that although he was the chairman of that committee he put it up to poor Austin to carry the report of their action to a hostile government. Do you see anything in that?"

Summers glanced around, uneasily. "You interest me," he said, "but this is a

poor place to talk such matters. Surely he has friends here."

"Friends? Yes, many friends. Did you ever see him, sir? No? Well, he is a striking figure. Men follow him because he is a giant and a born leader. But it is about time some one was speaking the truth, openly. If things go on this way, the country will face war, and I hate war. I was orphaned by the war of 1812 and thrown into the arms of relatives unwilling to receive me. Tonight I am—well, just Red Ruth, a—a woman of the gambling-halls of Nacogdoches. But I know this much: If war comes to Texas, it will mean more orphans and widows—many more. Houston, like many other men, talks loudly about freedom and independence, and forgets it is the women and children who pay the price."

JEFFERSON BUELL had been listening intently. This was no ordinary woman, no matter what she said of herself.

"Just what is back of all this trouble?" he asked. "I am like Abel, Will—I can't make it out."

"Nor can half the people living here," Ruth answered. "The real truth is this: Texas is too rich a plum to escape the eyes of the ambitious. Mexico first invited colonists here because she thought they would form a bulwark between her borders and the raids of hostile Indian tribes. The colonists came and found a garden spot. Then Aaron Burr cast ambitious eyes in this direction. Later Heyden Edwards had a dream too large for a little man. The Mexican Government, becoming suspicious, began quartering troops in the various departments. There was but one man who kept faith with them, even after they broke many of the provisions of the Constitution of 1824."

"You mean Austin?" Summers asked.

"Yes, Austin. Now he is lying in jail, but he keeps the faith. Jackson made a mistake when he sent Poinsette and Butler with offers of purchase. Mexico was smart enough to know that if the United States wanted it, then it must be worth keeping. Next Houston came—a friend of Jackson's. Do you see anything in that? And where did he come from?" She paused, waiting for an answer or for the question to take effect. "He came from living with the Indians," she continued. "The Indians call him 'Big Drunk.' Having made a wreck of his life, he is trying to beat back."

"Surely that is laudable, madam," Buell said.

"Of course. But let him climb the stairs where he fell. He is dreaming the same dream that ruined Burr. It will ruin him."

"Or make Texas," Summers retorted.

"I might have known you were of the war-party," Ruth flared.

"How could you know that?"

"Didn't you come riding into town with James Bowie? So did Houston. Whoever rides with Bowie knows—"

"Madam, I assure you I have known the man a short twenty-four hours. He joined us in camp beyond the Sabine."

"What was he doing beyond the Sabine? Did you ask him? No! Well, I can tell you. He comes from a meeting with Houston, who is somewhere over in Arkansas or Louisiana waiting for the hour. Bowie will feel out things here and go back to him in a few days."

"You are wrong there," Summers told her. "He rides to San Felipe day after tomorrow."

She looked around quickly and laid a hand on Will's arm. "Hush! Not so loud. There are some who would like to find him riding alone."

"Then you like him enough to protect him?" Summers asked, lowering his voice.

"Who does not? He growls at me because—because I am only Red Ruth, and he thinks my tongue too long. He knows that I know too much. If he is going to San Felipe, then he is carrying some word from Houston to Judge Williamson. I told you that Houston was the war-party. Actually it is Houston, Bowie, Williamson and Travis. They are brave, good men, but it is a forlorn hope. The Mexican Government isn't blind. They have plenty of paid assassins who would be glad to find Bowie riding alone on the prairies."

"You can rest a little easier," Summers said. "Two of us are going with him. Is there anyone here who would seek his life?"

RUTH nodded toward Cortina, who was still playing at the wheel. "There is one. And there are others."

"Who?" Summers pursued.

Ruth shook her head. "Ask him. He knows."

"But he might not."

"Oh, yes, he does! I'll warrant he was glad enough to have you with him in crossing the Redlands—though God knows he isn't afraid of the devil. But if you want

to hear him growl, just ask him how he would like to use that knife of his on Claude Gant."

Jeff Buell sucked in his breath with a sharp sound. Summers pressed his knee against Buell's.

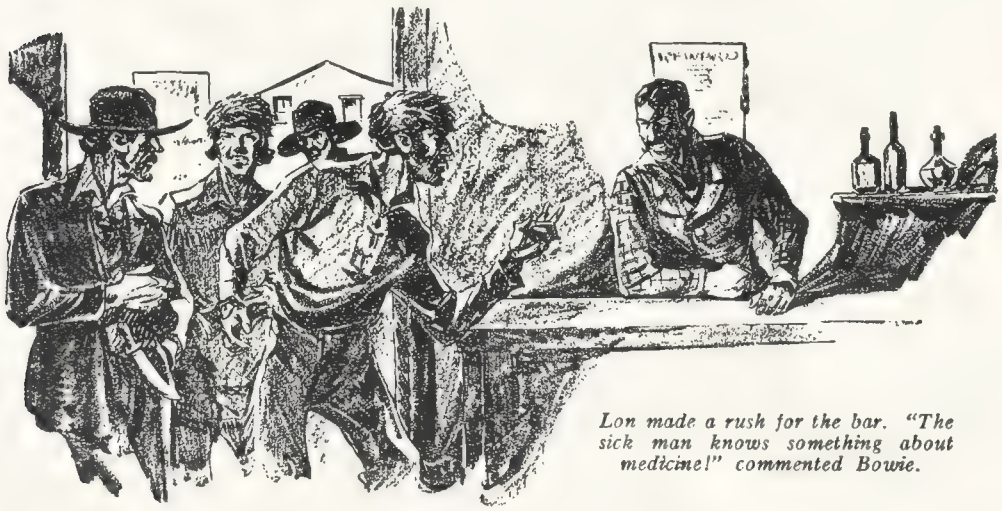
"Gant," he repeated musingly. "It seems I have heard that name before."

"You will hear it again before you leave Texas. He has been the head of a band of border ruffians for two or three years, but he's too slick to get anything fastened on him. When things get too hot, he disappears."

Ruth studied his face for a moment. "Gant isn't interested in cards," she said. "He is playing a game of empire."

"Oh, I see!" Jeff said, and giving Summers a quick look, arose from his chair. "I have been interested in what you have had to say, madam. You seem to know more about affairs here than any man I have met so far. I would like to talk more, but one of the men who came with us is sick with a fever, and I must go see if he is sleeping well. Coming with me, Will?"

"Yes, in just a minute." He turned to the woman as Jeff walked away. "Are you



Lon made a rush for the bar. "The sick man knows something about medicine!" commented Bowie.

"Is he a Texan?" Summers asked.

"God knows what he is! Some Spanish blood, I think. He carries off the rôle of gentleman well enough."

"You know him?"

"Oh, yes! He used to come here quite often. But he wont show up here again. Nor anywhere else in Texas—alone."

Again Summers stared Buell into silence. "Is he a land-holder?" he asked, pursuing the questioning casually.

"Yes. He holds a large grant down near Bexar, close to Bowie's place, but he is playing for higher stakes than one little grant of land. At one time, when it was to his advantage, he was an Austin man. Santa Anna bought him—body and soul. He is on the side where he thinks he can find the most feathers for his own nest. If you ever meet him, you will know him for a man who plays for all or nothing."

"I should like to meet him," Jeff said with a quiet reserve. "I too like to play for high stakes."

the woman Mr. Crews says is such a fine hand with the sick?"

She laughed. "*He* thinks so. I pulled him through once. Nearly everyone sends for me when they get sick."

Summers drew a step nearer. "As I told you, I am going on with Bowie. One of my dearest friends is sick, and I must leave him in the care of that man who just left us. He is a doctor, but somehow I would feel a little better about it if he had the care of some one who has a reputation for being a good hand in fever cases. I want you to promise me to step in and help if he gets worse. And I promise you that I wont forget."

"I'll help if they ask for me," she said. "The forgetting part doesn't matter. I'm used to that."

"Can I ask you one other question—in confidence?" Summers asked.

"Of course."

"Do you know where this man Gant is now?"

"No, I don't."

"Is there any chance of his coming here?"

"No, no! It's too dangerous—for him."

"If you wanted to find him," Summers pursued, "where would you look?"

The woman studied this for a minute. "In Mexico, probably, with Santa Anna's army. If he is in Texas, he wont come east of Bexar."

"Thank you. You will say nothing of my interest in the matter?"

"No. If you want to know more, talk to Bowie. I'm sure he'd like to find him."

SUMMERS turned away and went to Bullard's room. Jeff was just coming out, closing the door quietly behind him.

"He's asleep," Jeff whispered. "That's one good sign."

"How sick is he?" Summers asked as they walked along the hall to their room. "Do you know just what is wrong, Jeff?"

"No, Will, I don't. But I don't think it's serious."

"We can't take any chances. I want you to get that woman, who calls herself Red Ruth, to help nurse him. They tell me she is a fine hand with the fever."

"*That* woman! Why, she is—"

"Never mind what she is!" Summers rebuked him. "She can help, and that's something. Lon is your first patient in your new country, Jeff. See that you cure him. His sickness brings me face to face with questions of duty and obligation. Bowie says that Jim's wife is in San Felipe. She can't have much money. I know how to get back her land, but how could she use it? None of the children are old enough to help. She is my charge, Jeff."

"I know," Jeff answered with sympathetic understanding. "How can you get back the land?"

"Leave that to me. In one way it is just as well for me to go on with Bowie. He knows the trails, and I should be back here, with Mary, in two or three weeks. You and Lon can wait here for me."

"But I—"

"One problem at a time, Jeff. I'll help you find Gant just as soon as I can get Mary established."

"What about Lon and Abel?"

"Lon will take up land. Abel will go where I go. I'm not worried about them. But I am worried about you, Jeff, and about Caroline. You have been away three months now, and the end is not yet in sight."

Buell sat staring at the floor. "I wrote her a long letter from Little Rock, when we stopped there," he said. "Poor Sis! She wont ever understand just why I left her there."

"You'll write her again—from here?" Summers asked.

"Will you?" Jeff countered.

Summers turned away and walked the length of the room. "No, Jeff," he answered at last. "We've talked that all over before. Since she doesn't know the truth back of your sudden departure, doubtless she blames it on me. But you know, and I know. There is nothing I can ever say—to her."

Jeff came over and stood by him at the window. "Don't be a fool, Will. I've told you a dozen times that you are wrong. I know Caroline and I know her heart. One word from you would bring her here."

"To this? Caroline here—in this country? No! I wouldn't have it that way, even if I could. Besides, I have a big enough problem facing me now. But you must write her often."

"Of course. And after I find Gant, and get settled somewhere, I'm sure she will come."

"I'm afraid you wont find him so easily. That woman, Red Ruth, just told me she doubted whether he could be found in Texas."

"In Texas or in hell, I'll find him!" Jeff retorted.

CHAPTER XII

NEXT morning Summers sought out Bowie and told him he would like to examine the records of land-titles in the old Edwards Colony.

"They're kept by the alcalde," Bowie told him, "and as I told you yesterday, some of them are mixed pretty bad. It hasn't been but a few years since Austin ordered the records kept."

"But surely the record will show who holds my brother's land."

"Yes, I reckon so. We'll go over to Reug's store and see Henry. If anybody can help, he can. Is your name Summers or Winters?"

"Winters—for the time being."

"All right. Henry Reug will take you to see the alcalde. Henry can find out what you want to know."

"I can find out myself, if I can see the

record," Summers said. "I am a lawyer, you know."

Bowie eyed him for a long minute. "No, I didn't know," he said. "And if I was you, I wouldn't say anything about it. We've got a little suspicious of new lawyers drifting in from the States. You look like a woodsman. All the lawyers I ever saw wear different clothes from what you do. But if you are a lawyer, you don't need Henry. Go right to the alcalde. Here, come out on the street and I'll show you his office."

Summers followed. Bowie pointed out the low, squat building. Then he turned and pointed out the mercantile store of Reug and Roberts.

"Come there when you get through," he said. "I want to buy some things before we start out tomorrow—including a new hat."

The alcalde was a pleasant man and offered his regrets that the records were not complete in all cases.

"I want to see who holds title to the land that was once owned by a James Summers," Will told him.

"Oh, that! Well, you see there was quite a mix-up on that piece of land. They proved that Edwards had no right to grant it to Summers, that it belonged to a Mexican named Farias. I think it was a fixed-up affair, but the Government always backs the Mexican. Summers went about defending his title in the wrong way and got shot for his pains."

"Yes, I heard about that," Summers said, as casually as possible. "His widow was ousted, I understand."

"There wasn't anything else to do," the alcalde defended. "Some time after she was put off the land, Farias sold out to a lawyer named Crenshaw, who had helped him establish his claim."

"I see. Where does Crenshaw live now?"

"Down at Washington, I hear. Things were getting too hot for him in this department. He wasn't here more than a year and a half, and was always at the bottom of some trouble. Are you interested in that piece of land?"

"Yes. I may buy it from Crenshaw. May I see the record?"

"Of course."

THE record showed a transfer from Farias to Crenshaw for a consideration of two hundred dollars. Summers felt sure that the consideration was purely fictitious. Borrowing paper and a pen from the alcalde, he sat down and wrote out a deed, describing the property by the metes and bounds set out in the record. He named himself as grantee and Crenshaw as grantor. The consideration he placed at one dollar. Folding the deed carefully, he placed it in his pocket, thanked the alcalde for his courtesies and went back down the street toward Reug's store. It was a morning of warm sunshine. A negro slave boy, driving cows down the street, was singing:

Rose, Rose, my coal-black Rose!
I nebber see a nigger dat I lub lak Rose!

Summers smiled. If a slave boy, following cows, had the heart to sing, then surely a freeman should be of light heart —especially now that Fate was delivering up the enemy.

AT dawn the following morning Bowie, Summers and Roundtree mounted their horses and clattered through the empty streets of the town. Each man carried a four days' supply of rations in his saddle-bags, and Bowie was wearing a large fawn-colored Vicksburger he had purchased at Reug's. At the edge of the town they took up the old road to Bexar, expecting to hold it until they crossed the Trinity. On the west bank of the Trinity they would leave the Bexar road to the north and swing southwest along a less clearly defined trail leading to Washington.

At noon they made their first halt on the banks of a small creek. The horses were watered and hobbled, and Bowie soon had a small fire burning. Game had been sighted all along the road, but they had made no effort to secure it. The bacon which they carried in the saddle-bags was a welcome change from a long-enforced diet of fresh meat.

The business of preparing the noonday meal was a matter which each man took care of for himself. Bacon strips, impaled on green sticks and held over the fire, constituted all the art of cookery that one need know.

While they were giving the horses an hour's needed rest, Summers decided it was time to win added confidence by giving Bowie some concrete facts concerning his presence in Texas. The recital was unvarnished and stripped of all color and unnecessary detail. He glossed over the two years spent in Washington, including it only for the purpose of establishing his right to

the claim of being a lawyer. He made it clear that his first mission was the reëstablishment of the rights of his brother's widow, following which he would take up land. Throughout the talk he steered clear of the political situation, but held the secret hope that his frankness would cause Bowie to talk.

Bowie listened attentively, and when Summers had finished, said:

"There's land a-plenty here, as you can see, but before winter comes, Texas will be in arms. We've stood about all we can, and the pot's boiling." He hesitated for a moment, studying Summers' face for any sign that would betray his inner feelings. Abel's interest was in a grass rope which he was twisting with a forked stick. "It is a question of liberty or slavery," Bowie went on. "Which side are you on?" He put the question with a directness that tore down all barriers of suspicion and reserve.

"If I were a Texan, there would be but one choice," Summers answered. "Which side are you on?"

"Red Ruth had it about right," Bowie answered. "I belong to the war-party. I reckon I can talk pretty freely with a man who will ride as far as you have to take care of his brother's wife! In San Felipe you will meet Judge Williamson—Three-legged Willie, we call him—and he's boiling over now to start things. Travis is just waiting for a chance. Houston is the biggest duck in the puddle, and he'll come at the right time."

"He sorta petered out over in our State," Abel commented.

Bowie glanced at him shrewdly. "He wont peter out here," he said.

"You know him?" Summers asked.

"Yes. Don't you?"

"I never met him. Where is he now?"

"Handy," Bowie said succinctly as he arose and began packing his saddle-bag. "We'd better be moving. I want to make camp tonight over near the head of Hurricane Creek."

"Who is that woman Red Ruth?" Summers asked as they were saddling the horses.

"The Lord knows," Bowie answered. "For one thing, she is the best game-keeper in Nacogdoches, and she's got a better hand with sick folks than any of the doctors. Nobody has anything to do with her until somebody in the family gets sick. Then they send for Red Ruth. People are funny that way. Some say her father was a rich planter down New Orleans way, but I come from Louisiana myself, and I never heard of her until she turned up in Nacogdoches."

"She told me she was made an orphan by the war of 1812."

"Yes, that's her story, and it's as much as you'll ever get. —Ready?"

AGAIN they swung into the saddles and took up the trail. Bowie and Summers led, abreast, with Abel following close behind. Leaving the bottom land on the creek, they climbed out onto a broad expanse of prairie. The grass, warmed by a month of sunshine and soft rains, was tall enough to ripple under the unsteady gusts of wind from the southwest. Meadowlarks swarmed the prairies. Intoxicated by spring, they trilled their songs with such an ecstasy that all other bird-notes were quite drowned out. The grass, the flowers, and the good green smell of earth, were enough to stir Abel into tuneless song.

Under cover of Abel's high-pitched chant, Summers said to Bowie:

"I wonder if you happen to know a Texan named Gant."

Bowie wheeled in his saddle and studied Summers' face, trying to determine whether he spoke of a friend. He decided to be cautious, but his growl gave him away.

"Yes, I know him." Unconsciously his hand sought the handle of his long knife. Summers saw the movement and smiled. He decided to taunt Bowie into words.

"Friend of yours?" he asked.

"Not by a long shot!" Bowie retorted. "You know him?"

"I met him back in Washington."

"Oh, ho! So that's where he's been. When did you see him there?"

Summers evaded the direct question. "He left there in December," he answered. "I understand he sailed for the mouth of the Brazos."

Bowie shook his head. "He may have told you that, but he never landed there. He went on to Mexico to report to Santa Anna. He is a spy and a traitor to the cause of his own countrymen. He will never have the nerve to set foot in Texas again unless he is with the Mexican army. There are too many who would like to split his throat."

"Indeed!" Summers answered, assuming surprise. "What for?"

Bowie did not answer at once. He rode along, absently twirling the ends of his bridle-reins. Cautious thought displaced the scowl on his dark face.

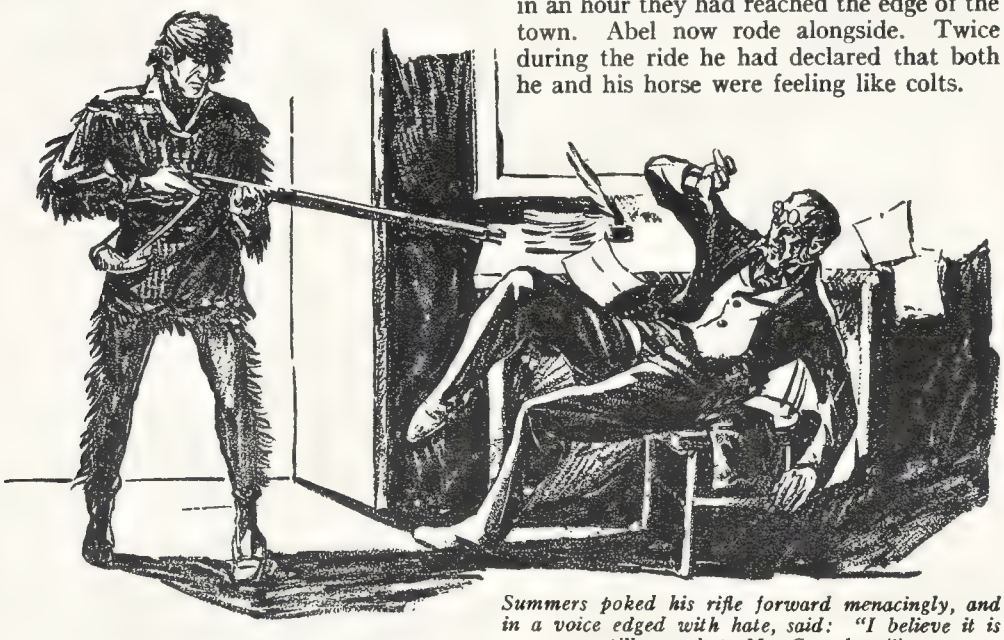
"Well, Mr. Summers," he said at last, "there is such a thing as talking too much in Texas just now. All I can say is that I'd like to run across Gant."

"So would I," Summers replied with an earnestness Bowie could not well mistake.

"When you find him," Bowie answered, "you'll find him with the Mexican army—and I hope I see him first." Again Bowie lapsed into silence.

plan of action went a long way in increasing Bowie's confidence. At any rate it loosened his tongue. That night, for the first time, Bowie talked without reserve, sketching dramatically and pungently the background of the internal disturbances and wrongs that were slowly but surely driving the colonists to open rebellion.

At eight in the morning, a purposely late start, they were again on their way. Within an hour they had reached the edge of the town. Abel now rode alongside. Twice during the ride he had declared that both he and his horse were feeling like colts.



Summers poked his rifle forward menacingly, and in a voice edged with hate, said: "I believe it is still my shot, Mr. Crenshaw!"

Abel was still in contest with the shrill tremolo of the meadowlarks.

CHAPTER XIII

TWO days later, at late evening, the three riders made camp within a few miles of Washington, on the east bank of the Brazos. Bowie was for riding on into town to spend the night, but at Summers' insistence he agreed to the halt. After supper Summers decided to take Bowie into his confidence in the manner of how he intended to handle Crenshaw. He had already outlined the plan to Abel, who had approved of it with gusto. Bowie listened and smiled broadly at the prospect. Now he could understand why Summers had not wanted to go on into town. Much depended upon the element of surprise.

The delay had one other marked advantage for Summers. His story and his

Coming to the center of the town, Bowie pointed out Crenshaw's office. At a hitchrack a little beyond they dismounted and tied their horses.

Crenshaw's office was in a log structure a story and a half high. The upper part, Bowie said, was used as sleeping quarters. The street door was open.

"Wait here," Summers directed as he tied his horse. "I'll walk by the door and glance in. If he is there, I'll walk on, then turn around and give you the sign. You meet me at the door. I wont need your help, but I'll need witnesses."

Rifle in hand, he walked swiftly down the street. At the door he slowed his stride and gave the interior a sidelong glance. At a pine desk sat Crenshaw, his back half turned to the door. Summers passed on a few paces, then turned and nodded to Bowie and Abel. They met him at the door.

With his rifle crotched under his arm, Summers entered. At sound of footsteps

Crenshaw turned, peering over the tops of his steel-rimmed glasses. Then, in surprise, he shifted the glasses higher on his nose and started to get up from the chair. His round little legs failed him. His lower jaw sagged down. Again he shifted his glasses. Surely they were deceiving him.

Summers poked his rifle forward menacingly, and in a voice edged with hate and barren of pity, said:

"I believe it is still my shot, Mr. Crenshaw."

CRENSHAW tried to speak but no words came; he appeared to have lost control of his tongue. His lower jaw hung open in wordless amazement. His eyes shifted to Bowie and to Roundtree. They stood just back of Summers, as impassive as Indians. There was no comfort there. He glanced across the room to the mantel, where a rifle hung on two forked sticks. It was a long journey, and he knew he could never make it. Even if his bloodless legs would carry him that far, that menacing rifle in the hands of a cold killer would speak before he had taken the second step. Past events trooped through his mind. He remembered that night in the woods when he had seen this same buckskin-clad figure lift up before him and utter the same words that had just now been repeated. He remembered his panic. It came again, more devastating than before.

Summers took a step forward, and Abel quietly closed the door.

Crenshaw slid out of his chair like a fat sea lion slipping over a rock to plunge into the sea. On his knees he found tongue.

"My God, Summers! Don't shoot! Don't shoot! What do you want?"

"So? You remember me well enough. And you remember the land you stole from my brother? You hadn't the courage to face me, so you got even with me through my brother."

"I didn't do that, Summers! Before God I didn't do that! You must—"

"Hold your tongue! I wouldn't believe you if you stood before God."

"But it is the truth. I swear—"

"Must I kill you, Crenshaw, to keep you from swearing to more lies?"

"It's the truth—I swear it! But I will pay you. I will pay you. See—wait!"

Crenshaw's eyes lit up with the gleam of a new hope. His fat, stubby fingers began clawing at the rough floor. They were trembling almost beyond control, but at last he lifted up a short section of puncheon, neatly fitted, and drew from the dark recess a heavy black metal box.

"Here," he said, throwing open the lid and running his fingers through bank-notes and coins of silver and gold. "Here is money. I will pay you. Here is over five hundred—more than the place is worth."

Summers stepped forward and kicked the box from his hands, scattering the contents over the floor. Then he jerked the frightened man to his feet and forced him back into the chair. From his own pocket he drew out the deed which he had drawn in the office of the alcalde at Nacogdoches, spread it upon the table and dipping a quill into the ink-pot, handed it to Crenshaw.

"Sign that!" he ordered.

Crenshaw began reading the document.

"Sign it!" Summers barked. "I've no time to waste. For your information it is a deed to my brother's land. The consideration is one dollar." He reached into his pocket, drew out a silver dollar and cast it clanking on the pine desk. "Sign it!" he said again as he jammed the end of the rifle into Crenshaw's ribs.

In Crenshaw's trembling fingers the quill pen scraped haltingly across the bottom of the deed.

Summers turned to Bowie and Abel. "Sign this, please—as witnesses," he said.

Abel bent low over the paper. Turning his back to cut out Crenshaw's view, he whispered to Summers:

"You guide the pen, Will. Dang you, why didn't you shoot him before you embarrassed me this-a-way?"

When the signatures were attached, Summers turned to Crenshaw.

"This is not a very legal way to get a deed, Crenshaw, but it will answer. You will never contest it, and—"

"My God! Don't shoot—"

"Shut up! Unfortunately, I haven't time to kill you. I'd be forced to stay here to explain why I did it—and I'm in a hurry. But you wont contest this deed, Crenshaw. You haven't the nerve. You know I would kill you. Texas is a big country, but it isn't big enough for both of us. I'll be back through here in a few days, with Jim's wife, and if I find you here then, so help me God, I'll kill you! Remember, you still owe me one shot."

Returning the deed to his pocket, he turned and strode through the door, almost breaking into a run in an effort to overcome the burning desire to shoot Cren-

shaw in cold blood. So great was his anger and stress that as he walked toward the hitch-rack he failed to notice that Abel had stayed behind.

THE moment Summers walked through the door, followed by Bowie, Crenshaw began crawling around on hands and knees, gathering up the scattered bills. When he had collected them, Abel reached over and jerked them from his hand.

"I'll take these, Mr. Crenshaw," he said. "Will's partickler-like, but I aint so choosey. I reckon Mary and her kids'll have use fer it."

Crenshaw jumped up belligerently.

"Set down!" Abel menaced him with his rifle. "And don't git keerless. The night you and Will went into them woods, I forgot to load his rifle. I thought you'd ought to know, seein' the distance you've run and the trouble it's caused you. But this gun"—he patted the stock of his rifle—"is loaded, Mr. Henshaw. I'm more partickler with my own gun." He stuffed the handful of bills into a pocket as he backed toward the door. At the doorway, he said: "I'm much obliged to you fer keepin' all this money fer Mary. This must be a pretty good country when a man like you can git a-holt of so much. But it's healthier now back in Tennessee, Mr. Bradshaw, and the road's wide open. I advise you to take it."

He deliberately turned his back as he passed through the door. . . . .

"What have you been doing?" Summers demanded when Abel joined them.

Abel made believe he was bending over a recalcitrant knot in the bridle-reins. "Oh, nothin' much. I jes' stayed behind to give him a little advice."

Mounting, they rode out of the town and took up the trail leading to San Felipe.

CHAPTER XIV

SAN FELIPE DE AUSTIN, the capital of the department of the Brazos, was more purely American than the town of Nacogdoches, though somewhat smaller in population. The people of the town itself, and the country round about, were sober, serious-minded colonists who had been lured here from the States by the reports which Austin had sent out concerning the richness and fertility of the land.

Austin had been careful in the selection of his colonists, and the moral fiber of his grantees was higher than in any other colony. Their civil and criminal code, written by Austin's hand, was more clearly defined and more faithfully upheld. Gambling was expressly forbidden under the law; profanity and drunkenness were misdemeanors punishable by fine; and prostitution was frowned upon by a law providing for imprisonment and hard labor. San Felipe, therefore, was less colorful than Nacogdoches, but infinitely more desirable for the true home-seeker.

The alcalde, Judge Williamson (Three-legged Willie—so called because he had a wooden leg and augmented this with a rudely fashioned crutch), was a man who knew how to enforce laws by creating respect for them—and who was American enough to dream of freedom and not confuse it with a dream of empire.

It was to Williamson that Summers went the morning he arrived in San Felipe. And it was enough for Williamson that he came in company with Bowie.

Summers briefly sketched his story and gave the object of his mission—leaving out, to Abel's disgust, the episode of the meeting with Crenshaw in Washington. Williamson listened with kindly sympathy and blew his nose a little suspiciously when Summers touched lightly on the matter of his duty to his brother's wife.

"She is here, all right," Williamson told him, "and well enough taken care of. We haven't much money, but we've food and shelter, and we share that. She came down from Nacogdoches with some other colonists, bringing a wagon loaded with household goods. They tell me she drove her own wagon every step of the way. Clem Cooper had a vacant house which he turned over to her, and she moved in. There's a woman for you, sir! You wont have her on your hands long."

"What do you mean?" Summers asked.

Williamson winked shrewdly. "Well, Mr. Summers, women are none too plentiful in this country. Ben Petty lost his wife last fall; and it's a sight, the amount of stuff he's sent over to that woman since she moved in Cooper's house! We never knew Ben was so generous! She's a likely-looking woman, and Petty has a mighty good farm. I'll be willing to gamble that I'll be tying a knot there before the summer passes."

"But—but Jim hasn't been dead six months," Summers protested.

Williamson sagely nodded his large head. "I know. But things are different here. It is a hard country—especially for a lone woman. Respect for the dead doesn't fill the flour-barrel. Ben is smart enough to know that, and so is she. She knows she could go farther and do worse. If I were you I'd just forget about taking her back up to Nacogdoches. Besides, you haven't any land there, have you?"

"I've just bought a place up there," Summers answered, looking hard at Abel.

"I'd just let it lie," Williamson advised. "If you suggest going back, she might hesitate to protest. Ben is a little backward, and I don't think things have come to a head yet. You'd better locate here with us. There's a piece of land about a mile out of town that has been forfeited by a man who has gone back to the States. Like a good many of the others, he lost his nerve when Austin was thrown into prison. He left the whole matter with me to get what I could. I'd take it myself, but a three-legged lawyer can't do much with a farm. It has an extra large log house, story and a half, and enough good timber to build a dozen more rooms if you wanted to add on to it. The land's rich—especially good cotton land."

"I'm afraid I'll have to be content with what I have," Summers answered, "although I think I'd like it better here. I spent just about all I had for the place I bought." Again he glared at Abel. Bowie was smiling broadly at something he saw through the window.

"How much would it take to buy this place?" Abel asked. "I'm lookin' fer some land myself."

Summers eyed him suspiciously. Williamson seemed surprised. This tall, gaunt woodsman did not look like ready money.

"Have you a family, Mr. Roundtree?" Williamson asked.

"No-o, but I'm jest about to adopt one. Does a man hafta have a family to buy land here?"

"Oh, no! I was just wondering. It isn't the land that I'm offering for sale, but the improvements and the tools. The land was a grant which has been forfeited. But Austin has always sought men with families. The man who gave it up thought he ought to have something for his work—if he can get it. So do I. It is a good house, there are plenty of tools, and nearly a labor of land has been broken out at first one time and another."

"Will told me about labors, but I fergit," Abel said, scratching his head. "How much is a labor?"

"A hundred and seventy-seven acres—roughly."

"And how much land altogether?" Abel asked, assuming an air of a man who bargains cautiously.

"A sitio. That's about four thousand, four hundred and twenty acres."

"God A'mighty! That's a lot! How much does he think he's ought to git for his tools and what he's done to improve it?"

Williamson was lawyer enough to keep his eye on a fee, but he was at a loss to size up this man.

"I think he would be tickled to death with two hundred and fifty—or three hundred dollars."

"Which?" Abel asked, curtly.

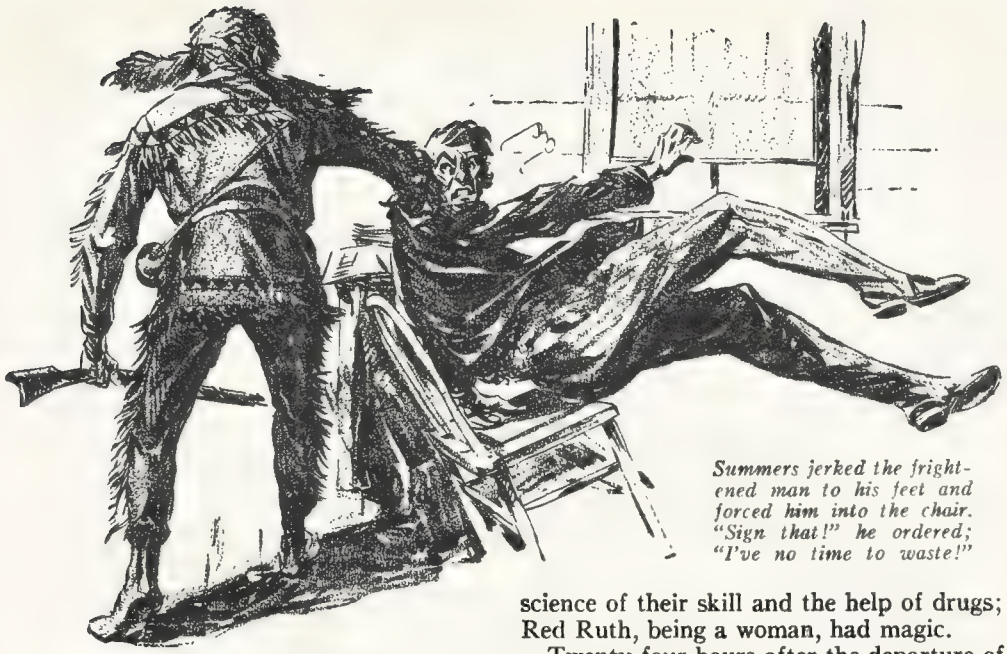
"Well—say three hundred."

"I'll take it," Abel said quickly. He fished around in his pocket and drew forth a large roll of bank-notes. Tossing two bills on the table, he said: "That'll bind the bargain until I can take a look at what I've let myself in fer." He avoided Summers' eyes as he returned the roll to his pocket.

"Where did you get all that money?" Summers demanded, quite forgetting Williamson's presence.

Abel did not forget. "Now, Will, that's a personal matter. In the first place, it's none of yore business. But if you must know, I got it fer givin' a man some good advice."

UPON Williamson's assurance that the title grant would be taken care of in due course, Abel and Summers spent the following week in moving Mary and the three children out to the new place and in making the house habitable and homelike. Before the end of the first week, Summers was in full agreement with Williamson's estimate of Mary. There was a woman for you! She sang as she went about her work. Not for a minute did she seek sympathy by tearful recitals of her woes and tragedies. Once, when Summers unexpectedly entered the kitchen, he surprised a few tears on her cheek. She brushed them away quickly, stoutly declaring that the chimney was not drawing well and that the room was full of smoke. Summers agreed, coughing gallantly. It was not for him to destroy so brave a fiction.



Summers jerked the frightened man to his feet and forced him into the chair. "Sign that!" he ordered; "I've no time to waste!"

There was much work to be done about the place, and it wanted doing all at once. There were endless repairs to be made; crude but substantial furniture to be fashioned by hand; many little improvisations which needed the hand of a man skilled with tools. Added to all this, the early and swift-moving season demanded that the cotton land be plowed and made ready for planting.

For once Abel forgot all his ills and complaints as he plunged into the field work with a will and tireless strength that even Summers could not match. The days were long and the work hard, but when they turned from the field at night, they were certain of a meal equal to their hunger and a bright-eyed welcome that more than paid them for all their toil. And after the meal there was always a romp with the two older children.

And Mary, sitting at the spinning-wheel or still busy over household tasks that were never ended, was learning that men, even as women, can bravely carry off a duty.

DURING those two weeks when Summers and Abel were making the first moves in the readjustment of the broken threads in Mary's life, Bullard, back in Nacogdoches, lay at the door of death. He would have passed through but for the grim determination and tireless watchfulness of Red Ruth. As Crews had said to Summers, she had a better hand with the fever than most doctors. Doctors had only the science of their skill and the help of drugs; Red Ruth, being a woman, had magic.

Twenty-four hours after the departure of Summers and Abel, Buell knew that he was faced with a serious case. He knew, too, that he alone could not win. He called in Red Ruth. She came, and that night, as well as all the nights for the next three weeks, another croupier kept the wheel in the lobby below. She seemed never to need sleep, never wearied of her vigil, never abandoned hope.

One night, at a long last, a feeling of infinite weariness and indifference came over Bullard. It would be so easy just to drift. . . . . There was a big white cloud sailing over a billowing meadow. . . . . Trees grew out of it, and in their deep shade was lush, green grass watered by a fountain. . . . . He could fly up there, rest in the shade of the trees and let the spray from the fountain fall over him.

But something was holding him back. Oh, yes! That woman with the bright red hair was chafing his wrists and calling his name. And a young man, with drawn face, was holding a small glass of liquid to his lips. A voice came, indistinct and far-off. It was the woman speaking. She was urging him to fight. So? They did not want him to go over and sit on that cloud?

He began trying to fight back to a more sensible consciousness. He found it difficult to keep from slipping over the edge of something and flying over to that cloud. But he fought against it, and this struggle was the one spark Red Ruth needed.

An hour later Jeff and Ruth knew that the fever was broken, the crisis passed.

They had won the fight. But Ruth knew, too, that her hours of watchfulness were not yet at an end.

DURING the two or three weeks of Bullard's convalescence, Buell found quite enough to occupy his mind and his time. The child of a poor Mexican laborer lay stricken by fever, and Jeff had been called to her side. The family was without funds, but their need was none the less great. Again Jeff realized that his was only the skill of the man of science. The extra needed thing was the magic of Red Ruth.

Then there occurred a gunshot case, demanding the amputation of a hand. Again Red Ruth was called in. There was no man in the household strong-stomached enough to be of help during the ordeal.

So it was that by the time Bullard was beginning to take to his feet, Buell had become so occupied with the saving of life that he had almost forgotten the burning vengeance that had brought him here. He was learning that hate and love cannot occupy the same heart.

In late April both Buell and Lon received letters from Summers, brought by a rider coming up from San Felipe. In the letters Summers declared that the land was better in Austin's colony, and that to his mind the town of San Felipe was in many ways superior to Nacogdoches—at least to the extent that it was more American.

In the letter to Lon, Summers enclosed the deed which had been wrested from Crenshaw. He requested Lon to take it to the alcalde and have it entered of record. No explanation was given as to how it had been secured; only the statement that it was at least worth what he had paid for it and that some day he might have a chance to sell it and turn over the proceeds to Mary.

In the letter to Buell, he wrote:

"This is a better town for you, as a doctor, than Nacogdoches. I am afraid the chance of finding Gant is a slim one. Bowie told me that he is in Mexico I have made other inquiries and have learned a few things which I can tell you upon your arrival. A big, red-headed fellow named Travis tells me that Gant will never again set his foot east of the Colorado unless he comes with the Mexican army. Bowie says the same. But in any case, you can do well here, I am sure.

"I hope you have written to Caroline. You must remember, Jeff, that she will be very lonely, and mails are slow. I have taken the liberty of writing her, and of stating that you will soon join me here."

Jeff smiled at this last. It was typical of the way Summers worked his will.

Then the smile faded. It irked Jeff that Summers would even hint that they might have to abandon the search for Gant. Anger flared up; then he suddenly remembered that he had promised to call upon the sick wife of a farmer.

By the time he had reached the wagon yard and had saddled his horse, all thought of Gant was gone from his mind. He was no longer a man of vengeance following the trail of another; he was a healer going out to visit the sick.

WHEN Bullard's strength increased he began to take short rides over the roads and trails radiating from the town. Buell always accompanied him. On two or three occasions, at Bullard's request, Red Ruth rode with them.

To Ruth these men were utterly different from those who crowded around the games in the gambling-halls of the town. They offered no apologies for riding with her, they cared not a straw who saw them in her company. Here were men who knew what it is to be grateful.

One day when the three were riding together they followed a path, scarce more than a game trail, until it faded altogether in the deep woods. Bullard drew rein and dismounting sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree. Ruth stood by her horse, stroking his neck. Buell, boylike, sprawled belly down in the grass.

This day they had ridden in silence. Bullard seemed in no mood for conversation. Two or three times he had started to speak, but each time had broken off abruptly. Ruth and Jeff, sensing the mood of their companion, had held their tongues.

Bullard wanted to talk but he did not want Ruth to hear. Yet he knew that she must hear. Sitting on the fallen tree, he at last found tongue.

"I'll be strong enough to go on now in a day or two," he said.

Ruth gave a little gasp of surprise. Then, to cover her confusion, she began running her fingers through the mane of the big bay.

Jeff rolled over and sat up. "You're weak, yet, Lon," he protested. "There's no hurry."

"Summers is getting anxious," Bullard answered. "I think we had better go on."

"Why are you going on?" Ruth asked, keeping her eyes on the work of her fingers.

BULLARD looked at her for a long minute. What a striking picture she made, standing there by the side of the big bay, her hair reflecting the light that streamed down through the leaves and her cheeks as full of color as those of a child! When he began to notice such things, Lon told himself, it was time to be moving on!

"I have just told you why," he answered at last. "Summers is anxious for us to come on."

"Why should you follow him?" she pressed.

Lon shrugged his shoulders. For the life of him he could think of but one reason why he should make haste to follow Summers, and that reason stood before him, pressing a question.

"Jeff is anxious to go on," he said, seeking escape on the shoulders of another. "He wants to set himself up in San Felipe."

"He has set himself up here," Ruth answered before Jeff could speak. "Perhaps better than he will do in San Felipe. Isn't that true?" she demanded, turning to Buell.

"Well—" Buell began slowly, "I have at least done better here than I ever did back home. But maybe things get better the farther you go."

"That's the man, for you!" Ruth retorted. "Always chasing a rainbow. You always think there is something better farther on."

"That idea has gone a long way toward settling this country," Buell answered.

Ruth tossed her head in defiance. "Yes, and most of the men are the very ones who didn't, or couldn't, make a go of it back home."

"Oh, come now!" Jeff said, knowing that in his case, at any rate, she had struck the mark.

"It's the truth," she went on. "I could give you a dozen examples—men who just dropped the reins back east and came out here because 'cows' horns are long at a distance.' They thought they would find something better. Actually, they were only trying to run away from themselves. I'd think a man would have too much spunk to run away from something he was afraid of."

She had been talking to Jeff, but her eyes now strayed to Lon. He avoided them and began digging into the moist earth with the toe of his shoe. The silence was long. At last Lon looked up and smiled.

"I think you are exactly right about Jeff moving on," he said. "There's plenty here for him to do. And I'll admit the town suits me pretty well. I—I like it here. I guess I'll look around and see if I can't start a little store."

Nacogdoches was working its spell. Those who stayed too long found difficulty in leaving. But Bullard knew, deep in his heart, that it was not the town alone that was holding him. Ruth had flung him a challenge. He wouldn't run away from the one thing of which he was afraid.

For days Jeff Buell had been seeing things that escaped Lon's eyes, and as they rode back into town he noticed that Ruth had a new look in her eyes—a look that was half hope, half triumph.

CHAPTER XV

ALTHOUGH Summers had set his mind and his heart upon the development of the farm, he could not close his ears to the war mutterings of the colonists. Many of the rights assured them under the Constitution of 1824 had been violated by the Mexican Government and there was a widespread fear that Mexican troops would soon be quartered throughout the various departments to enforce the dictatorial will of Santa Anna, who had long planned to send armed forces into Texas to prevent any uprising which might injure his plans to establish himself as the "Napoleon of the West." He had reason to suspect that the colonists were planning independence, for there was many who did not bridle their tongues and who openly championed a struggle for freedom. Texas was asking for statehood at the very moment when Santa Anna was planning a program to reduce all of the states of the federation to mere provinces, leaving the central government in position to make laws, collect revenues, and impose taxation without any representation on the part of the peoples of the provinces.

Such a program might find no armed opposition on the part of those provinces which were purely Mexican, inured as they were to vassalage, but it would find hearty resistance in Texas. Here were men descended from those farmers who had stood against the legions of the king at Lexington, at Bunker Hill, and at King's Mountain. They were the sons of men who loved freedom. Their sires, having once bought it with blood, gave the heritage of freedom to sons who loved it the more passionately. Santa Anna might make his plans, but he

had yet to reckon with the Anglo-Americans of Texas.

His real plan was obscured under the growing discontent of the colonists over the questions of land speculations and the collection of customs. Although they did not know his plan, their grievances were none the less great and their fears became increasingly greater when the rumor spread that Austin was to be transferred from Mexico City to a prison in California. Added to this was the threat that armed garrisons would soon be placed throughout the departments.

Santa Anna had failed to read the causes leading up to the war of the Revolution; he had failed to take into consideration the blood-streams of these men whom he was planning to rule.

BY the early part of the summer the various departments were warmly divided into two factions—the war-party and the submissionists. Leading the war-party were such men as Travis, Williamson, and Bowie; the latter now being in Monclova attending the meeting of the legislature.

It was natural that Summers should be strongly influenced by such a man as Williamson. On many occasions, when riding into San Felipe, he spent hours with Williamson and soon became convinced that war would strike before the summer passed.

One day in the field, when he and Abel were chopping weeds out of the cotton and Abel was fretting over the fact that they had not been able to get in a larger acreage, Summers, leaning on his hoe-handle, said:

"It doesn't make any difference, Abel. I'm afraid it will never be picked. The less we have in the less we lose."

"What do you mean?" Abel asked. "Aint we goin' to git title?"

"Oh, that part will work out all right! But we'll be carrying a rifle by fall instead of a cotton bag."

"Now, Will, you keep yore nose out of that business. Here I've been workin' my fingernails off to plant a crop that I hate in the first place, but now that it's planted, by doggies, I aim to pick it! I belong to the peace-party. If Three-legged Willie don't close his pan on all this talk he'll hafta be runnin' faster than his peg-leg can carry him. That's all his talk'll amount to. That Mexican General—what's his name? Cos?—will send some soldiers up here to capture the leaders and that'll be the end of the thing."

"Do you want to be ruled by them?" Summers asked.

"No, but the road's cut out between here and Tennessee. I made it once and I reckon I can make it ag'in. You're a fine one to be talkin' war! What about Mary? What's to become of her? What we been workin' our daylights out fer?"

"Mary will be married before fall," Summers answered.

Abel's mouth opened in astonishment.

"What? I thought Petty had kinda got cold feet after we showed up. He hasn't been over here but twice."

"I know; but it was Mary who gave him the cold feet. I couldn't quite figure it out at first, but I soon discovered that she had shooed him away because she thought she was obligated to stay here and keep house for us. I had a long talk with her and found out exactly where the wind lay."

"Well," Abel said with a slow drawl, "we did come a mighty long ways to do our bachin'."

"That's exactly what she was thinking," Summers answered. "We came here to help her, Abel, but we can't take the place of a husband. She needs a husband to help rear her children. Petty needs a mother for his. At first I didn't like the idea, but I know now that it is a good match. Things couldn't go on this way forever. Since we came to help her, our first thought must be for her."

"You say you talked this over with her?"

"Yes. I've got things fixed up. You'll see more of Petty from now on."

Abel leaned heavily upon his hoe-handle and looked down the long rows of weedy cotton.

"Who're we choppin' weeds fer now?" he asked. "Mary or Petty?"

"Neither. Petty has a good place and more land than he can use. The place up at Nacogdoches will be deeded to Mary—or sold if we get a chance. Mary understands that and so does Petty. That part is all fixed. This place will come to us. And when the trouble is over, maybe I'll hang up my shingle in San Felipe and you can run the farm."

Abel glared at him. "You're a hell of a fixer! You marry off the best cook in Texas, you pass up a wad of money right under yore nose, you saddle me with a farm I don't want, and then you talk about leavin' me on it when the trouble's over. The trouble has already begun! Fer my part I'm going to stick by this measly little

Dawn was streaking the east when Ben Petty lifted Mary to the seat on his wagon, and proudly climbed beside her.

old piece of cotton till I can git it picked and sold. Then you can have the farm. I'm headed for Tennessee."

Viciously he began swinging his hoe as he started down a new row.

IN June and July the hands of the Master Weaver were busily engaged in drawing the tangled threads of men's lives toward one common center for the completion of the pattern. In the early part of June there occurred at Anahuac an incident of far-reaching effect and of great help to the war-party. Some Mexican soldiers under Tenorio, who was enforcing the collection of customs at that port, fired upon and killed a young man of the town.

The news of this incident was promptly dispatched to San Felipe.

That town began buzzing with excitement and indignation. The war-party was gaining strength. In the midst of all this unrest a courier from General Cos arrived in San Felipe, bearing dispatches to the political chief of the town. Several of the citizens, now thoroughly aroused and with grounds for suspicion, waylaid the courier and seized his dispatches. Those dispatches proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the government was planning to bring the colonists under subjection. One of the letters was from General Cos, addressed to Tenorio at Anahuac, assuring the latter that he would soon be strongly reinforced by additional men under arms.

This was the match to the powder. If Cos was preparing to close the ports and occupy the strong coastal points, then it was time to strike! Accordingly, a meeting of the citizens of San Felipe was called for the following day.

Summers, hearing of the meeting, rode into town in company with Abel. The excitement of the citizens was a cold, deadly tension that augured ill for some one.

Williamson, presiding at the meeting, found himself strongly backed by an ever-increasing number of men willing to pledge their arms and their lives in defense of the rights granted them under the constitution. The resolutions of that meeting were fiery enough to suit the most impetuous. They expressed opposition to Santa Anna and his plan to rob the colonists of their rights, and resolutions were passed providing for the organization of a volunteer company for marching against Anahuac.

Abel Roundtree did not clearly understand the full purport of the meeting, but he could understand direct action. This meant action.

"Now, Will," he said, drawing Summers to one side, "you keep out of this. Somebody's goin' to git his whiskers singed."

Summers offered no reply. A few minutes later Williamson approached them and stopped to talk with Summers.

"This means business," he said, his eyes gleaming. "They've woke up to the fact that it's time to strike a blow. If I'm not

mistaken there'll be plenty of volunteers for this undertaking."

"I, for one, would go," Summers answered, "if it were not for the fact that I can't leave Mary just now."

"You keep your shirt on," Williamson advised. "There will be plenty of need for your rifle later on. Ben Petty was in to see me yesterday and hinted he was going to have need of me to tie a knot before winter. When is it coming off?"

"I don't know, exactly. In September, I think."

"That'll leave you sort of flat, wont it?" Williamson said. "But we'll make a time of it. Ben Petty has a lot of friends and there will be people at the wedding you never saw before. I'll bring along my banjo, if you like. I'm just as good at playing for a dance as I am at tying a knot or trying a case. And I like it better. Who's going to do the cooking after Mary leaves?"

Abel decided this was the proper time to make his position known.

"If you keep on talkin' war like it's been talked at these two meetin's today," he said, "we wont need any cook. We'll be sizzlin' in our own fat."

Having so expressed himself, he turned and walked away.

Williamson looked at Summers in surprise. "I thought he was with you," he said.

Summers laughed. "He is. You don't know Abel. When the time comes you'll find him riding right along—a little bit behind."

THE weaver of destinies drew another bright, strong cord into the fabric when the youthful, patriotic, impetuous Travis, with a little company of twenty-five stalwarts of his own fiber, stormed Anahuac from the waterfront and forced Tenorio to surrender. Acting upon the slender authority of the meeting at San Felipe, Travis had at once set about raising a volunteer company. Undaunted by the fact that only twenty-five men responded to the call, he held to his purpose. Twenty-five proved quite enough. The net bag was the surrender of the garrison, the capture of sixty-five muskets and bayonets, and the temporary frustration of General Cos' plans.

Travis had started war. Actually, he had fired but one shot from a small cannon, but it was heard as far west as Mexico, and it was heard east of the Sabine where Houston, with listening ear, had acumen enough to know that the rifles and horses of Texas would soon be on the march, no matter how the submissionists might view this hasty action.

Out of his seclusion he came, a Brobdingnagian belted about the middle by a gaudy sash and with a colorful blanket thrown carelessly over powerful shoulders. The great beaver hat topping the leonine head was pulled forward at a determined angle to shade deep eyes that were seeing what few men saw—the bright star rising. Westward he rode, silent, brooding, and unheralded—the new, strong, brilliant cord in the pattern of the great fabric.

At San Augustine he halted to make prophecy, but the people there were dim of eye and fearful of prophets. They mistook a giant for a dexterous juggler.

Tighter he pulled his gaudy sash, gave his blanket a scornful toss and grimly rode westward to Nacogdoches. He had met with fools before. Somewhere he would find wise men who could see a new star.

Travis had fired but one shot, and a giant came riding.

BY August the rumble of the approaching storm could be heard across the continent. Crockett's ears had long been attuned to it and he was tempestuous enough to want to be in the vortex. For the time being, however, his attention was held by his race for reëlection. He was still bitterly opposed to Jackson and was still on the search for the deposits. But again, as once before, a fickle constituency shifted its support from one skilled with the rifle to one who was skilled with the pen. Crockett's opponent was short on woods-lore and long on writing chronicles. The writer won.

When the result became known, Crockett drew away from the subsiding clamor of the campaign to look westward. He, too, saw the star. With characteristic earnestness he went before those who had deserted him and warned them once again against the evils of a dictatorial government. In closing his speech he said, with bitter vigor:

"You can all go to hell. I am going to Texas."

Another rifle in buckskin was soon to come marching. . . . .

Back in Washington, President Jackson listened anxiously for the first clash of arms. He could smell powder afar off. It

itched him and made him restless. For once his hands were fettered by treaties.

Nor was Jackson the only one in Washington who could see the signs. The Buell home was no longer the gathering-place for fun-seeking youth. Caroline Buell had no heart for dancing and no tongue for jest. Her eyes were toward the vast frontier that had swallowed her heart. It had taken the only two men in the world she had ever loved. One, the brother, had gone because his own heart was broken; the other man had gone because he could not love a woman who lacked courage—especially one lacking the courage to rebuke a dandy who made fun of his background.

A thousand times in the past six months Caroline had remembered that night when she had glanced up and caught sight of Summers watching her in the mirror. He had heard—his eyes told her that. She had held her tongue only because she thought Gant's unguarded remark would be the very thing that would spur Summers to action and loose his tongue. But he had taken her silence as assent because, in an effort to hold those things that were dear to her heart, she had pictured herself in the wrong light. Now he would never know. He would never come back. There, in that new country, he would marry some woman with courage.

IT was a devastating thought. Was courage the needed thing? If so, then as women had done from the dawn of time, she would follow the trail of the man she loved.

Only one word had come from Summers—a brief letter in which he assured her that all was well and that Jeff would soon join him in San Felipe. She had read it again and again, searching for some word of reassurance that he still felt in his heart what she had so often seen in his eyes. The word was not there, but at last the thought came: Why had he written at all?

Her answer to that question furnished soil for the seed of hope. She would go to Jeff. His presence would furnish her with fitting excuse, and it might serve to open the eyes of a blind man.

When she made her decision known to Major Langstone, he fretted and fumed and tried to shout her down.

"What will you do with the place?" he challenged, expecting to find her unprepared for the question.

"Sell it," she answered calmly. "Mr. Jim Herndon has offered to buy it."

"But you—but there—" the Major hesitated. Even now he hated to tell her the whole truth.

"There isn't much equity left," she finished his sentence for him. "I know all about that."

"And the niggers—what will you do with them?" He thought he had her there. She had always refused to listen to any of his proposals that she rid herself of several of the slaves who were not doing enough to earn their salt.

"Sell them," she answered resolutely. "You've told me a dozen times that I should. I'll keep old Chloe. She will go with me."

"You are crazy, Caroline! Jeff will be back here before long—glad enough to get back."

"Yes, if I stay here, he will. And what is there to come to? We have spent nearly everything. He wanted a new chance. I—I am going to help him."

The Major turned away and stood looking out of the window. He recalled that day when Summers had come into this same room with the letter from Mary. At last he turned from the window and walked over to Caroline. He put his arm around her, drawing her to him with fatherly affection.

"Is Jeff the only reason why you want to go out there?" he asked.

She avoided his eyes for a moment. Then, utterly tired, greatly in need of some one who could understand, she buried her head on his shoulder and broke into tears.

Major Langstone knew a great deal about love. . . . .

EARLY in September a boat cleared Chesapeake Bay, bound for the mouth of the Brazos. Among the passengers were a number of adventurers who had heard the faint clattering of mustering arms. It furnished them with a chance to escape the tedium of nothing to do.

Among others who stood on the upper deck, looking to sea, was Caroline Buell. Near at hand stood old Chloe, her arms akimbo as she glared at the gentlemen who seemed always to enjoy best the view from a position near Caroline.

Caroline's eyes, however, were toward the open sea. Not once had she looked back. There was nothing behind. In the

hold were two stout trunks, carrying those little bits of finery and mementoes which she could not give up. Everything now lay ahead. The question of whether men alone can subdue a wilderness never once entered her mind. She was occupied solely with the thought that woman alone, by her own skill, can never ease an aching, empty heart.

Into the pattern the weaver was drawing the white, pure thread of devotion.

AUSTIN, at last released from prison, reached San Felipe in September. Here was the greatest stalwart of them all. Here was the man who had dreamed dreams and made them all come true. His was the energy, his the devotion, his the privation and his the faith that had given land to the landless and a vision to those who could not see beyond the day or the hour. When others grew faint, he put his shoulder the more firmly to the wheel; when others lacked faith, he spoke words of courage; when other heads grew hot, his kept cool; when hotspurs fretted for war, he sought peace.

After eighteen months as a prisoner, wronged without reason and deprived of his rights, he came back to his own people, still anxious to preserve peace. However, his love of justice was greater than his love of peace, and within a fortnight after his arrived in San Felipe he faced a choice between absolute enslavement and liberty. Austin was capable of making but one choice. He issued a call to arms!

"There can now be no halfway measures," he declared at a public meeting. "War in full! The sword is drawn and the scabbard put aside until all the Mexican military are driven from Texas."

That night horsemen went galloping out of San Felipe, carrying the word of war throughout the departments and calling the men to arms. To Nacogdoches rode Johnson and Baker to urge that department to join the standard. "Tell them," was Austin's word, "that war- and peace-parties are at an end. There is no remedy but through arms. Our freedom and our lives demand that all the brave rifles of that department march without delay."

Many were the men of Nacogdoches waiting for this call. And eastward, at San Augustine, the tallest man in all the crowd stood awaiting those galloping messengers. He was Houston—the giant with the gaudy sash pulled tight about his middle and his eyes looking westward.

ON Saturday night following Austin's call to arms, Ben Petty and Mary Summers were joined in marriage. Williamson was there to tie the knot. True to his predictions, Summers found himself host to men and women he had never seen. For fifty miles they came on horseback, the men dressed in their best bibs and tuckers and the women carrying in saddle-bags dresses that had come from New Orleans and Philadelphia.

After the ceremony and the supper, the dancing began. West of the Mississippi there was no greater artist on the banjo than Three-legged Willie. He put his heart and soul into it, rapping time with the end of his peg leg.

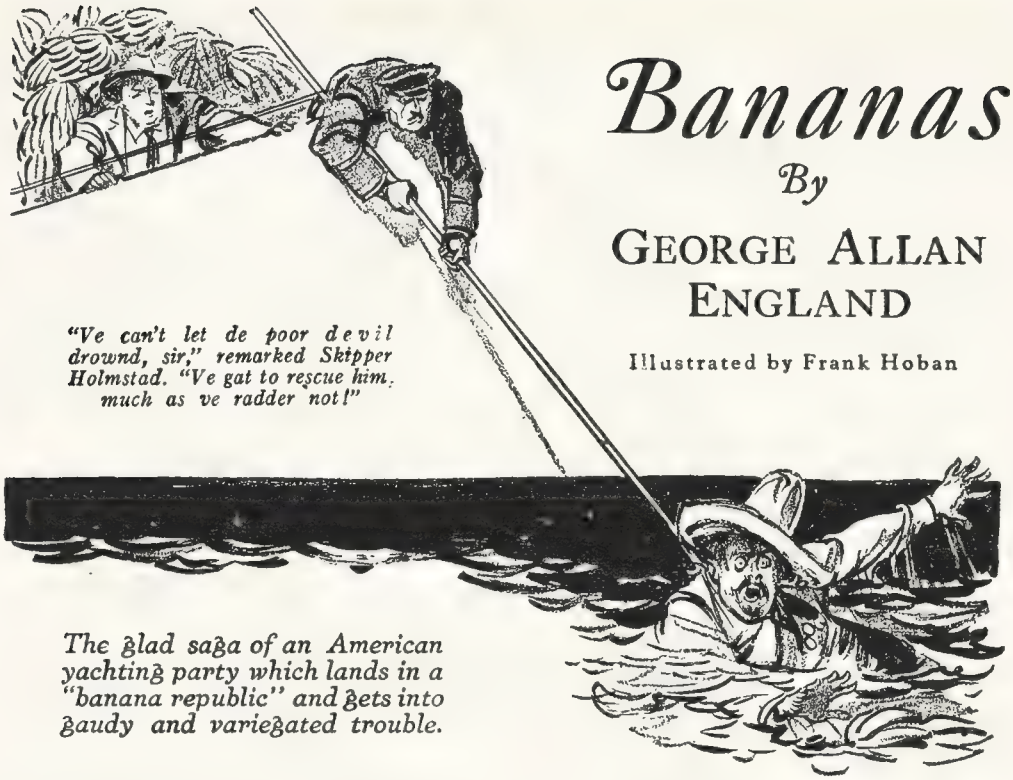
No stately, formal dancing would serve these people. They cut the pigeon-wing and the double shuffle. Many of the men whose feet were clad in moccasins borrowed shoes from their friends when their time came to dance and proceeded to knock the splinters from the puncheon floor. A jug of whisky brought from the store in San Felipe gave energy to the poor dancers even though it did not increase their skill.

DAWN was streaking the east when the most vigorous admitted that they were "tuckered out." Then, amidst much shouting and beating of pans, Ben Petty lifted Mary to the seat on his wagon, tucked her sleeping children into the blankets in the wagon-box where his own two boys lay sleeping, and proudly climbed to the seat beside Mary. His feelings had to have some outlet, and like a boy off to the fair he cracked the long bull whip over the backs of the sleeping oxen. They had been quite indifferent to all the noise and clamor, but the crack of the whip aroused them.

Slowly they got under way. There was no need to take alarm at one crack of the whip. Before they had turned into the road they knew that the bull whip had been put aside and that their driver was no longer interested in speed.

"Well," said Abel after he had watched the wagon turn into the road, "I'm in fer a long hungry spell now and I'd jest as well start drunk. Will, what's become of that jug?"

The climax of Mr. Venable's stirring novel of the old frontier is of special interest. Watch for it in the next, the March, issue.



"Ve can't let de poor devil drownd, sir," remarked Skipper Holmstad. "Ve gat to rescue him, much as ve radder not!"

Bananas

By

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The glad saga of an American yachting party which lands in a "banana republic" and gets into gaudy and variegated trouble.

DRIFTING in a singsong wail from the galley of Horatio Pemberton's good yacht *Picaroon,* the voice of Wong Lee chanted a ballad in these quaint terms here following:

我說我們有　各樣的果子　有蒜頭也有　有葱有白菜　有四季豆兜　們沒有香蕉　香蕉今天我　是我們沒有

Which, being resolved into syllables, sounded something like:

"Shih wo men mo yu shan chiao chin tien wo men mo yu shan chiao!"

On the after-deck of that spotless, brass-polished and mahogany-finished craft, a rather languid-appearing young man was reposing himself in a large wicker chair under the awning that softened the tropical sun-glare to a mellow light—almost as mellow as the beverage in the tall glass handy-by. The young man, in the whitest of flannels, took a sip and raised a mildly interested brow.

"My word, what an extr'ordinary song, eh? What the deuce is it all about?"

"Just listen to the tune, my dear Captain," answered Horatio Pemberton,—sixty-two, bald, lean and worth nine million,—"and you may get some inkling as to the sense. Now, this tune—don't you get it?"

"Can't say that I do, now, really."

"He's still too British," smiled Patricia Pemberton from the nest of pillows on the locker, where she was lying. With a quizzical air she studied the Captain—Captain Archibald Fitzmorris, formerly of the Princess Marjorie's Own Fusileers. "He's not Americanized enough, yet! That song," the girl added, "is the Chinese version of—"

"By Jove, yes, now I've got it!" The Captain nodded with huge satisfaction. "It's that deucedly clever song all about fruit and vegetables! How does it go, now? Oh— 'Yes, we are absolutely deprived of bah-nah-nas!' Capital, my word!"

"That's the general drift of it," explained Pemberton, while his daughter laughed with a glint of splendid teeth. "Though in Chinese it gets a bit side-tracked. Everything does. As now rendered by my paragon of a culinary artist, it goes:

'Is, we not have scent-tree,
Now day we not have scent-tree.
Four season beans have, green garlics have,
White cabbages have, white onions have,

Also have different kinds of fruit, I remark.
We have old style red foreign fruit,
Long piece hill-root,
But is, we not have scent-tree,
Now day we not have scent-tree!'

"And that reminds me," the yacht-owner added, "that we're really in that predicament. Been a shortage of fruit aboard here, several days. No excuse for it, in this part of the world. None whatever!"

"Why don't we-all put in somewhere and pick up a little?" suggested another voice, with a pleasant Southern drawl, from the aft door of the deck-house. The young man in the door was red-haired and inclined to freckles; also this newcomer, a son of the Old Dominion, looked almost more American than he really was.

"Good idea, Tolliver," approved the yacht-owner, blowing more smoke. Patricia nodded. "When it comes to fruit, Costa Linda ought to be a good place to get your money's worth. Only—well, I'm not sure it's a particularly healthy place to land in, these days. Puerto Cerdo being in the hands of General Rapaz Fulano de Tal, the military dictator—"

"You mean, ah, there's a crisis impending?" put in Fitzmorris.

"There's always a crisis impending down here!" Patricia exclaimed. "But I've never seen one un-pend, yet. And I'd just adore a crisis in action! Let's go ashore!"

"My dear daughter," objected Pemberton, "there might be danger of—"

"There'll be no upheaval as long as the opposition General Quisiera Tenerlo stays in hiding," rebutted Lee Tolliver.

"Whoopee!" Patricia exulted. "I only hope we run right spang into an un-pending crisis, revolution and everything!"

In the galley, Wong Lee still continued mournfully to chant:

老猻子紅 洋茄長稻 的山芋但 是我們沒 有香蕉今 天我們沒 有香蕉然

EARLY that afternoon the yacht lay at anchor in the harbor of Puerto Cerdo, about a mile from this sun-blistered little capital of Costa Linda.

That the yacht could approach no closer was due to the fact that General Rapaz Fulano de Tal had levied three million pesos tax, to dredge the harbor, but had decided that a new palace for himself, in the mountains at Vista de las Basuras, would be a more patriotic enterprise.

Horatio Pemberton, his daughter and his guests went ashore in a very spick-and-span launch, manned by the yacht's crew. With them also went Skipper Holmstad, the Swedish navigator of the yacht—that tidy little craft remaining manned only by Wong Lee and by McClatchy, the steward.

They all went down the accommodation-ladder on the port side. Patricia paused; her blue eyes had detected a surprisingly large and ugly-jawed fish not far from the launch. As it flirted away—

"My! What's that?" she exclaimed.

"Great barracuda," answered Tolliver. "They're high, wide and mighty biters, with a penchant for tearing people's legs off. All these waters are full of 'em."

"Never mind the barracuda!" Pemberton ordered. "All aboard, and let's go!"

At almost sea-sled velocity the launch sped up the harbor toward a cluster of red-tiled roofs dominated by the squat stucco tower of the Capitolio. To left of that azure and lagoonlike harbor crinkled palm-fringed hills. To right extended a low, arsenical-green coast clothed with mangroves on spiderish, crooked roots. On the *Aduana* or Customhouse the yellow-and-purple flag of Costa Linda wilted against a sagging pole. A whiff of marshy smell, the feverish exhalation of the tropics, wafted down-wind. Overhead a few buzzards, harbingers of death, wheeled on rigid wing.

"How gorgeously picturesque!" ejaculated Patricia.

"Jolly beastly place to be marooned, eh?" Fitzmorris commented.

"I don't think we'll stick around here very long," judged Pemberton, as with disapproval he eyed—through a shimmer of oppressive heat—a corrugated-iron warehouse on the wharf, backed by a line of discouraged and partly whitewashed buildings half in ruins. "What these people need, to get their money's worth out of life, is a little American pep. Hello! Got a railroad, have they?"

That they had a railroad was obvious even before the launch made her way in among several lighters strewn with banana-débris. A grotesque little engine, hauling cars heaped high with bananas, kicked its way down the wharf and halted. Gangs of men roused themselves to activity, chaffing, shouting, smoking cigarettes as they fell to work. Already by the time the

The official raised a commanding hand. "Estop!" he sternly ordered. "What for?" Pemberton demanded.

landing-party had clambered ashore on the wharf, more than a hundred Costa Linda peons were shouldering huge bunches of fruit, carrying them into the warehouse. Everywhere lay scattered a ruck of crushed bananas, of stalks, leaves. Heavy and rank hung the smell of decaying fruit.

"Isn't this perfectly amazing?" Patricia queried, with some astonishment. "I never imagined there were so many bananas in this whole world!"

"*These* beggars jolly well can't sing: 'Yes, we are today quite unprovided with bah-nah-nas!' Can they, now? Ha-ha!" remarked Captain Fitzmorris. "What a peculiarly disgusting superfluity of fruit!"

"But *I* thought bananas were yellow!" said Patricia.

"Are, ven you buy 'em," Skipper Holmstad grunted. "Shipped green. If shipped ripe, dey be yust pulp before gattin' North. Ripe bananas down here, no good, commercially."

THE landing-party made its way among the peons, some passably white, some totally black, some café-au-lait and all possible mixtures. They straggled over railroad-tracks, banana-refuse and unidentifiable clutter, all liberally patronized by flies, and entered the dingy little office. A nearly white man in an advanced state of perspiration came to a window made in a wire grille.

"You weeshin' somethin', señores?"

"Why, yes," explained Pemberton. "We're a party of Americanos—et cet. Just arrived. That's my yacht, out there." He pointed through an open window at the mile-off *Picaroon,* framed in sparkling sea. "We're short of fruit. Have none, whatever. Came ashore to get a little. Oranges, grape-fruit, bananas, pineapples, guavas? Savvy?"

"Ah, *sí, sí, señor,*" nodded the nearly white man, who was fat as well as sweaty. "Those orange, those pineapple and grape-fruit, I regret it, no. But those banana, *sí, sí, señor,* we have it."

"That's all you've got? Just bananas?"

"I sorry, but it is all, only those banana."

"Well—they'll have to do, then. You sell retail? Let us have a few bunches?"

The fat, nearly white man pondered, then nodded with all his chins, every one of which needed shaving.

"It is not our—what you call?—custom, the retail. But, yes,"—and he seemed struck by a happy thought—"still, nevermore-the-less, I make one exception. For accommodate our friends from glorious Unite' Estates! And how much of those banana the señor weeshin'?"

"Oh, I don't know. They must be pretty cheap, down here. Give me a dollar's worth, I guess."

"Ah! One dollar of those fruit, eh?"

"That's right. *Un peso,* savvy?" Speaking, Pemberton produced a dollar bill and passed it through the window.

"When you weeshin' those banana? Inmediately?"

"Oh, yes, right away. I don't suppose you'll make any charge for delivering 'em aboard the yacht?"

"Charge? Ah, payment, you mean? No, señor. This service, he shall be with—how you call it?—with the freedom."

"Thanks, and so long!"

PEMBERTON turned, and with the others started to leave the fruit company's office.

"There's a fine, honest Spig for you," he commented. "So unusually polite and intelligent! Lots of 'em treat Americans as if we were under suspicion, or something, but this one's different. Obliging, too. Not trying to put anything across. Puerto Cerdo's not so bad, after all. Hanged if it is!"

At the door, however, the millionaire's optimism regarding Puerto Cerdo received a sudden check. For as the little party issued forth upon the banana-strewn wharf, they were confronted by a molasses-colored gentleman in a greasy uniform originally designed for some other gentleman two sizes larger. And flanking this official stood two policemen, one of mahogany hue, the other rather inclining to a dark maroon.

The official himself was unarmed, but this lack of bellicose preparation was more than counterbalanced by the completeness of the policemen's armament. Each wore a sword, carried a carbine, had a revolver belted at his hip, and displayed a thoroughly filled cartridge-belt. And at sight of the yachting-party the official raised a commanding hand.

"*Estop!*" he sternly ordered.

FOR a moment, silence followed. Then—

"My word!" exclaimed Captain Fitzmorris. "We're apprehended!"

"What for?" Pemberton demanded. "What have *we* done?"

"Thrilling!" cried Patricia. "I've often read about an arresting spectacle, in books. Is this one now, in real life?"

"Not so good," Tolliver communed with himself. "Once these Spigs get anything on you, they raise unshirted hell!"

"What's the idea?" now queried Pemberton. He addressed the molasses-colored gentleman. "You want us?"

"I have the honor to demand you' landin'-papers, señor. It is unlawful to comin' on shore without those landin'-papers."

"The devil you say! *I* haven't got any papers—with me, I mean. But—"

"Everybody must showin' those passport, also, inmediately."

This produced a general statement that all passports were aboard the yacht.

"That's where my ship's papers are, too," explained Pemberton. "A mere technicality. We've got 'em, all right enough, but not right with us. I'll send for 'em. All right?"

"No, señor!" sternly the officer forbade. "Nobody can go, now. You are all here most illegal, and you no can depart yourself till all is arrange'!" Master of the Port, he was a bear on legality of the strictest. "Without proper paper, it is positive prohibit to make landing or go-away. Your men, here," and he gestured at the four sailors in the launch, "will be detain in the custody till you return. And you, everybody, must proceed to the Bureau of Inmigración, in the Ayuntamiento. All must proceed, with me!"

"Har, vat's all dis about?" demanded Skipper Holmstad. He had lingered a moment behind, but now rejoined the group. "Papers? Sure Ay gat papers! You don't tank Ay come ashore wit'out papers? Ay not so foolish!" And from his breast-pocket he drew a large brown envelope.

"Thank heaven!" Pemberton ejaculated. "Things were beginning to look devilish awkward."

Skipper Holmstad untwisted a string.

"Har!" And he presented the ship's papers. "All reg'lar, you see?"

The Port Master examined the papers, while his two minions stood watching the *Yanquis* with slit-eyed hostility.

"*Oiga!* He is no good, those paper!" finally judged the Port Master. "You have clearance from Miami. You have destination for Panamá, and permission for enter all ports name' here. But Puerto Cerdo no is mention'. Therefore you are here most unlegal. So you must all go to—"

"Go there, yourself!" cried the yacht-owner, ominously reddening. "And if it's any hotter than this—"

"I not meanin' what you meanin', señor," returned the Port Master, with an evil glance. "I meanin' the Bureau of Inmigración. Those unlegal matter must be arrange', or you never leavin' thees country!"

"How exciting!" exclaimed Patricia. "Just like a play, or something!"

"Yes, it's like something, all right!" Pemberton agreed, mopping his face with his handkerchief, for extreme heat and

emotion had lifted his blood-pressure nearly to the blowing-up point. "It's like a confounded, bare-faced shake-down! But I'm standing on my American citizenship, and I refuse to pay graft, even if, by gad! I have to start a little private war all my own!"

"War, war?" cut in the Port Master, his face dark with menace. "Your vessel, she is armed?"

"Off course she aint armed!" Skipper Holmstad protested, giving a private dig of his heel to Pemberton's white-duck-clad leg. "She gat nothin' but one small brass salutin'-cannon. Har, give me back de ship's-papers and ve soon fix t'ings, at de Immigration Office."

"Must we go?" asked the millionaire.

Holmstad nodded.

"Yas. Dey got us in a yam. No vay out of it now but to pay up some fine or odder, and be t'ankful it aint no vorse."

"Well, what must be, must be," Pemberton conceded with a sigh of resignation. "And it wont be the first time, either, that a little fruit has made a devil of a lot of trouble. Page Mr. Adam!"

HERDED along by the Master of the Port and his brace of satellites—while the launch sailors were marched into a near-at-hand shed by a small squad of *rurales* that now appeared on the scene—the little party trudged along the banana-littered wharf. Under a most devastating sun they took their way on toward the center of Costa Linda's capital.

Beyond the ruins of a monument to La Patria, which had been knocked down by the last hurricane and never set up again, arose the cracked and dingy brick façade of the Palacio. Goats wandered blatting along the sidewalks, where any sidewalks existed. Down the middle of the street that edged the south side of the Plaza struttingly paraded a fighting-cock, occasionally pausing to shrill out a defi of battle —answered from various patios by ambitious rivals.

Now, as the little party of inadvertent lawbreakers were herded down one side of the Plaza in stifling heat, toward the yellow-and-purple banner of the Republic drooping over the Ayuntamiento, all at once they heard a tattoo of speeding hoofs. This tattoo proceeded from somewhere beyond the Plaza. Then quite suddenly into view, from a crooked hill-street, burst a squad of dashing horsemen.

These horsemen, a dozen or so in number, were mounted on steeds of far better mettle than the usual rackabone beasts of this tropic land. All were heavily armed with revolvers, machetes and carbines in leather scabbards. By way of exception to the general run of Costa Lindan military men, they boasted uniforms that *were* uniform; also they were shod with leather, had shiny leather leggings, brass buttons and spurs, and by excess of smartness, wore huge-wristed gauntlets.

Splendid as was their appearance, that of their leader outshone, outdazzled them all. Talk about your Man on Horseback! Here *was* a Man on Horseback, none other than Costa Linda's military dictator, General Rapaz Fulano de Tal himself—the man whom his adherents called "Savior of the Fatherland," while at the same time his opponents were nicknaming him "el Zopilote," which is to say, the Buzzard!

Not an inch under six-two, barrel-chested and with a waistline that proved him as valiant a trencherman as ever he had in the old days been a machete-artist, Don Rapaz the Dictator was immense—nigh three hundred pounds of virile domination!

Add vast gauntlets of buckskin embroidered with gold thread, spurs of silver, two heavy revolvers, also a saber and carbine; add several bandoliers of cartridges, and perhaps ten pounds of medals that blazed and twinkled over a broad crimson sash, and you behold some faint likeness of the redoubtable Savior of the Republic, *alias* el Zopilote.

For a moment this formidable cacique regarded the semi-captives, who eyed him back with varying degrees of hostility and irritation. From one to another the Dictator's glance roved, even embracing the Port Master and the two policemen, now standing stiffly at salute. But when his look fell on Patricia, it roved no longer. Instead, it fastened itself on her with a most intense personal interest; with an admiration, stark and unashamed, much like that which any normal and hungry tiger might reveal when unexpectedly confronted by a particularly tender lamb.

"WHO—what?" the Dictator suddenly exclaimed in Spanish. He could talk English, too, on a pinch. "Who are these, and why here?"

"*Norte Americanos*, your Excellency," replied the Port Master, hand still at som-

brero-rim. "Tourists. They have broken the port entry laws. I conduct them to the Ayuntamiento."

"Ah, so?" General Rapaz nodded. "And the señorita? Who is she?"

"My daughter, *if* you please!" gusted Pemberton, in Spanish. His knowledge of that language, though not extensive, had sufficed for him to catch the Dictator's drift, and to reply. "And will you be so good as give this person,"—indicating the Port Master,—"orders to release us? Our breach of your national law is trifling and unintentional. We apologize, señor! Allow us to proceed on our journey!"

Instead of replying, el Zopilote fixed a saturnine eye for a moment on the millionaire, then barked out an explosive and scornful laugh, and again gave Patricia a piercing look, every second of which was an insult—while he directed a rapid stream of Spanish at the Port Master.

This stream shot along far too vertiginously for any of the semi-captives thoroughly to understand. All that any of them caught was:

"Mucho dinero. . . . . señorita. . . . . muy bonita."

Whereupon el Zopilote made a gesture at the sea, then shook his gloved forefinger rapidly sidewise in the Spanish gesture of negation, and set violent spurs to his mount. This reared, hurled itself into a gallop. The General's military staff likewise spurred and galloped after him, and in a cloud of bricky dust the party vanished toward the Palacio.

A moment, the men of the captive group stood silent in their indignation. Pemberton first voiced his wrath.

"Well, by gad!" And his gray eye glittered. "If I had that bird in the States, I'd give him *his* money's worth!"

"Give him some for me, too," said Skipper Holmstad. "But you aint gat him in de States. And so—"

"Oh, how perfectly romantic!" Patricia enthused. "Isn't the General a figure right out of a novel?"

"I'll take my paralyzed oath I'd novel *him,* if I got a chance!" This, from Tolliver. "That Spig's crookeder than a snake with St. Vitus' dance going through a washing-machine! The way he looked at you—"

"My word, a most peculiarly saucy beggar, eh?" queried Fitzmorris. "I'd beastly well enjoy chastising the fellow, you know!"

"Vamos!" commanded the Port Master. "It is enough of the talking, now. Forward!"

And flanked by the brace of policemen, he once more herded his charges through that overpowering dust and heat, toward the Ayuntamiento.

"Another thing I didn't like at all," added Pemberton as they trudged onward, "was his remark about *mucho dinero.* That sounded bad to me. Regular hold-up, or shake-down, or whatever you call it."

"It sound good to me," affirmed Skipper Holmstad, pondering with an imperturbable blue eye. "You may gat out of it vit' only payin' money. If you do, you're lucky."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean,"—and the Skipper spoke close to Pemberton's ear,—"I mean, damn' lucky! El Zopilote, he gat a devil's reputation as a lady-killer. An' a man-killer, too. Whatever he like to do, he yust *do!* If he take notion to steal your daughter, he vouldn't t'ink no more of havin' us men all shot by moonrise, dan Ay t'ink of killin' a fly. So—"

"He'd—the devil you say! But—he wouldn't dare, with American citizens, like most of us!" None the less, Pemberton's bronzed face paled a little. "He'd never risk the chance of an American gunboat coming down here and blowing Puerto Cerdo clean out o' the water!"

"Lot of good dat do us, if ve ban all dead," the Skipper returned. "All dead—exceptin' *her*—and he carry her off into dem mountains, up dere. My adwice to you, sir, as a old sailor, is pay up quick. No matter how much dese robbers ask, pay up quick, an' let's gat avay from dis port while de gattin' is good. I said all I can, an' it's enough!"

Up the worn, tiled steps of this very much cyclone-battered structure they all ascended, awakening two armed guards and three dogs. They also disturbed a goat, a sow with a bevy of piglets, and quite a flock of chickens. But having passed all these zoölogical specimens—and some others too small to be readily noted—they were presently ushered into the office itself of the Master of the Port.

NOW, we have other and far more stirring events to witness than the process whereby Horatio Pemberton—wisely accepting Skipper Holmstad's advice—satisfied the claims of the outraged Law.

"Who are these?" exclaimed the Dictator. "Tourists, your Excellency," replied the Port Master. "They have broken the port entry laws."

Negotiations were arduous and, toward the end, even more heated than the atmosphere itself. We can abridge matters by stating that in something under two hours, with the office piled high with legal books and documents, and with all hands pretty much exhausted, an agreement was reached.

"It is finish'," at last the Port Master announced. "The reparation is satisfactory, and the liberty is to you."

Returning no thanks whatever, Horatio Pemberton mopped his fervid brow and led his party out of the Ayuntamiento. He was some two thousand pesos lighter in pocket, but his heart was even lighter than that. For now the way of escape from Costa Linda and all its works lay clear and free. He held an official receipt in full for all port dues, charges, violations, infringements, torts, obligations, fees, mulcts, penalties, amercements, forfeits, damages, sequestrations, demands, requisitions, exactions, decrees, mandates, impositions, also all writs, rescripts, warrants, summonses, claims, prescriptions and citations, as duly provided by Costa Lindan law.

And everything was all elaborately handwritten, signed, sealed and delivered in the manner that only those can understand who have ever been so unfortunate as to have had dealings with that law aforesaid.

"Well, we've got our money's worth of red tape, anyhow," he grimly remarked as with his party in tow he lighted still another cigar and made way toward the water-front. "Let's see 'em try to hold us, now. Nothing more can happen to us. Hanged if there can!"

Which remark, though emanating from a successful financier, proves that even successful financiers are sometimes extraordinarily mistaken in their prognostications.

THE immediate future, true enough, yielded no untoward developments. In safety and unmolested—despite many a hostile look—the party retraced its steps through Puerto Cerdo, and reached the wharf littered with banana-rubbish. The yacht crew, now released from surveillance, were waiting at the launch. All seemed quiet along the water-front. The barges were peacefully tied up. Lethargy reigned. Even the dogs and buzzards were at rest.

Thus too, betimes, a summer landscape will lie, immediately before a storm breaks.

"Calm enough, now," remarked Tolliver, as he helped Patricia down into the launch. "We've had just a little bobble of complication, but it's all over and no great harm done." He seemed to view with entire equanimity Horatio Pemberton's loss of some two thousand pesos.

"All a false alarm, eh?" Fitzmorris queried. "But what a jolly lot of formalities! Extr'ordinary chaps, my word!"

"Oh, I'm terribly disappointed!" complained Patricia. "I was *so* hoping for a little excitement, a revolution or something.

Nothing ever happens, for me. Every time I go to a fire, it's always out before I get there. And when there's a procession, the brass band always stops playing just before it reaches me. I'm the unluckiest girl alive!"

Pemberton looked regretful, on account of his two thousand.

"I don't know but what we were a little too easy," he judged, as the engine began to purr. "It was a clear case of extortion. Extortion, by gad! Maybe I ought to have resisted. What do you think, Skipper?"

"Tank? Ay tank ve aint out to sea, yet. Time enough to vissle ven you gat out o' de voods. Dat vat *Ay* tank!"

Despite Holmstad's gloom and carping, and the girl's disappointment, the spirits of the party in general were high as the launch began hurling foam from its sharp bows. Captain Fitzmorris lighted a cigarette; Tolliver hummed a tune, and the millionaire let his cigar-smoke trail in that superheated tropic air.

"After all," he reflected as the launch bore them swiftly toward the yacht, "after all, what's a mere two thousand, when my daughter's safety was perhaps involved? Certainly I didn't like the way the General eyed her, hanged if I did! But she's safe now. And this has taught me a lesson, not to go butting into these obscure Spig ports where we have no landing-papers and where there's not even an American consul. I'm only paying for being a fool—taking such chances just for a little fruit!"

This realization turned his thoughts to the bananas he had purchased.

"I wonder," he said aloud, "now that we're all through the mix-up, whether these bandits have cheated us, too? Suppose they've kept their bargain, and delivered the fruit aboard?"

The sailors, on being interrogated, knew nothing about this. They had been kept confined in a shed on the wharf, had seen nothing.

"Bet a dollar there's no bananas been delivered," judged Tolliver. "All these robbers know how to do is gyp you, a thousand ways from Sunday. Catch *them* keeping a bargain! The only thing they know how to keep is your cash!"

"My word!" suddenly exclaimed Fitzmorris, who had been gazing ahead. "Something deuced odd, you know!"

"Odd about what?" Pemberton demanded.

"Why, the jolly old yacht, to be sure!" With an air of wonderment, he pointed. "She doesn't—ah—look at all the same!"

"What's the matter with her?" asked Tolliver. "Has anything happened on the yacht, since we've been ashore?"

"By gad—I—I don't know. But she does look queer, and that's a fact!" the millionaire admitted.

"She's down by de head," announced Skipper Holmstad. His keen seafaring eyes narrowed. "An' she's got a list to stabboard. What's more, her shape—"

"And color!" Pemberton cried. "That is, her topworks have kind of changed color, haven't they? They were brown when we left. And now—"

"My gracious!" exclaimed the girl. "They're yellow, now!"

"Yellow?" queried Captain Fitzmorris. "My Aunt Jemima! What the deuce?"

"Something infernally queer going on, here!" Pemberton asserted.

"You're darned whistling, there is!" agreed Tolliver. "But what?"

"Quicker we find out, the better!" the millionaire snapped out. "Full speed ahead—open her out, boys!"

"It look to me, sir," the Skipper began, "as if—"

"Is she sinking?"

"No, not axackly, sir," Holmstad made expert appraisal, while everybody stared at the strangely metamorphosed yacht. "But she might. Might turn turtle, sir, an' founder, if she vas loaded only a bit heavier."

"Loaded? But when we left her, she was light as a cork!"

"Yas, but ven ve left her, she didn't have no bananas aboard."

"Bananas?" echoed various voices.

"Bananas?" insisted Tolliver. "Is *that* what makes her so yellow?"

"Nonsense!" cried the millionaire. "One dollar's worth of bananas couldn't—"

"Vun dollar's vorth," the Skipper affirmed with a positive air. "Vun dollar's vorth, is right!"

FOR a moment blank astonishment held the party silent, while the launch kept her swift course out toward the amazingly altered yacht. Amazingly transformed, indeed! Not only was she now far down by the head, but she was altogether very low in the water, and her starboard list seemed perilous.

Furthermore, no sign of her mahogany upper-works remained visible. All had now

become a rich yellow. Spots of the same color blotched the top of her deck-house and rigging, also extended along her rail. Taken as a whole, she resembled a yacht that had passed through a heavy blizzard of yellow ice and snow, and now—just about ready to give up the unequal struggle—seemed disposed to roll over and sink.

The silence shattered, as Pemberton emitted a formidable roar:

"*I'll* banana 'em! *I'll* teach these Spigs to play tricks on *me!* To fine me, and stare at my daughter, and then try to sink me with bananas! I—I'll sink *them!* I'll come back here and sink their whole damn' country! A joke's a joke, but—"

"Dis har aint no yoke, sir," interrupted the Skipper. "It's yust a business transaction."

"Business? Business, nothing! It's attempted destruction of my property, that's what it is! Malicious mischief! All I bought was just a dollar's worth. And they've loaded the *Picaroon* with tons and tons of 'em!"

"Even so, it's business," the Swede insisted. "It's a dollar's vorth. How much ice an' snow can you buy at de North Pole, for a dollar? Tons an' tons! An' ripe bananas, down har—"

"Well, of all things!" rejoiced Patricia. "Father's always talking about getting his money's worth. Now he *has* got his money's worth, for once. Whoopee!"

"Silence!" Pemberton commanded, ominously reddening, as the launch swiftly drew close to the shockingly disfigured yacht. "This is no occasion for ill-timed pleasantry. It's a conspiracy of these Spigs, to wreck and destroy us! I'll fire that steward of mine, and Wong Lee, too, for letting any such despicable trick be put over on us! I—I'll—"

Just what else he intended to do remained unspoken, for even as he spluttered with passion, the launch ranged round the stern of the *Picaroon* and slowed toward the accommodation-ladder. Over the rail, laden with a bulwark of bananas, loomed the pale and agitated face of McClatchy, steward of the yacht. He peered out like a trapped animal from incredible masses of fruit—from banana-bunches piled in runways and alleys, heaped on decks, stacked against the deck-house, pyramided on top of it; even strung up in the rigging and dangling overside from the rail.

"You, there!" vociferated the millionaire, while the others all stared—all but Patricia, who ventured to laugh. "What the devil's the meaning of all this, hey?"

"It—it came out on a lighter, sir, not long after you went ashore. It's your supplies, sir."

"Supplies? Supplies? I'll supply *you!*" And Pemberton shook a vigorous fist. "You're fired! So's Wong Lee! What in Tophet d'you mean by letting those Spigs put all these bananas aboard?"

"How could I help it, sir?" asked the trembling McClatchy. "They had a bill o' sale, sir, all receipted and in order. Said you bought the fruit and told 'em to put it aboard, for which they weren't to charge anything, and—"

"*Charge* anything!" Pemberton exploded. "Well, my—I—you—say, listen! Common-sense would have told you—but there! What's the use?"

The millionaire was panting with heat and rage as the launch came alongside the accommodation-ladder. One of the sailors caught and held it with a boat-hook. Even the manropes of that ladder were sagging under tied-on bunches of bananas.

"I told 'em the best I could, sir—not speakin' much Spanish—I told 'em!" the unfortunate steward tried to explain, still peeping out over his trenches and rifle-pits of bananas like an enemy besieged. "I tried to explain as how this here aint no dollar's worth. But they says it *is!* They claims ripe bananas got no value here. It's only green ones you can put a price on. An' as they had a few tons that had gone ripe on 'em, an' they wanted to get rid of—"

"That'll do, now!" snarled Pemberton. "We'll soon fix *this*. All aboard, now, and let's get busy cleaning ship!"

WHILE the sailors held the launch steady, Pemberton stumbled up, his temper still further exacerbated by his being impeded by the various bunches of ripe fruit strung along the manropes and by his slipping on a few miscellaneous loose bananas. A bit smeared but full of fight, he reached the deck.

After him came Patricia, carefully handed up by Fitzmorris and Tolliver. They followed, with the Skipper, leaving the sailors to secure the launch.

"My sainted Aunt Jemima!" was all that Fitzmorris could say, as he surveyed the scene. The others couldn't say even that. Silence, from a vast and overpowering astonishment, overcame them. There seemed

something appalling, incredible, almost cosmic, in bananas to this extent.

Never had a yacht been more radically altered by taking freight aboard. Bananas filled every available space, and some spaces that didn't seem available. They were even suspended from the funnel-stays and piled into the lifeboats. Though mostly in bunches or large "hands," a good many thousand loose ones chinked, as it were, the interstices of the principal masses. And outward fullness of the *Picaroon* was not all. Muted exploration, as best it could be made, revealed bananas heaped in the saloon, bananas in the staterooms, bananas in the pilot-house, bananas even down the engine-room hatch.

"I wonder if the devils have filled the galley, too," exclaimed Pemberton with an exceeding great bitterness. Turning thither, clambering over a barricade of slippery fruit, he heard a low-pitched wailing tune. Chinese syllables drifted to him:

"Mo chin tien wo men yu shan chao!"

"Stop that, you banana-colored rascal!" he shouted in a gust of passion. "You're discharged, anyhow—but if I hear you singing another word of 'Yes, we have no bananas!' by gad, I'll heave you overboard to the barracudas! Stop it, you hear me?"

Wong Lee's bland moon-face appeared at the galley door.

" 'Scuse me, boss," he explained. "I not sing banana, yes, have not got. I sing banana, no, *have* got! Have got, too, today, allee samee plenty fluit? I think so!"

With a shuddering groan the millionaire raised clenched fists—then turned away.

"What's the use?" he ejaculated. "Talking doesn't get us anywhere. We've got to *work!* All hands stand by to clear ship. Come on, boys—peel your coats and let's get to it!"

Obedient to his commands, yet really needing none, everybody fell to work.

SUCH hauling, dragging, heaving and throwing was never seen before; such whirling and flying of big ripe bunches through that superheated air; such a splashing and foaming of the azure sea. It would have made many a Greek and Italian heart ache, in the States, to have witnessed what seemed such a wanton flinging-away of prime golden fruit. But gold in one place, may it not be merely dross in another?

Drudging with a hearty will, with swinging backs and active muscles, they all labored, even Wong Lee. Horatio Pemberton, coatless and with shirt-sleeves rolled up, toiled with the others. Not the least sweaty was he, nor the least banana-pulp-spattered. But this was now no time for dignity or appearances. There was work to do, much work! Grab, heave, whirl, splash, plunge! Right merrily the job went on. And floating all about the yacht, a widening circle of banana-bunches began to drift and spread.

But not for very long, however, did these intense activities continue. For hardly had a space round the accommodation-ladder been cleared, when certain doings began to be visible from shoreward. Men moved, shouted and gesticulated in an agitated manner on the wharf. And presently a thick black smoke began pouring from the funnel of a very small vessel. An archaic old tub of a wood-burning tug, its vertical boiler half exposed to view, began puffing and wheezing away from Puerto Cerdo.

This quaint craft, laden with armed men in several kinds of uniform, steered directly for the *Picaroon*. Shouts drifted from it. And by the tone and tenor, those were angry shouts of warning and command.

"Hello! What the devil, now?" exclaimed Pemberton, as this apparition loomed to closer view. He paused in his banana-heaving and squinted at the approaching tug. They all paused and squinted, even Wong Lee.

"My word!" remarked Captain Fitzmorris, wiping his brow with a silk handkerchief of delicate hues, "what a jolly queer little craft, eh? I wonder—ah—if she wants to speak to us, or what?"

"They're coming out to pick up the bananas," Tolliver judged. "We're throwing 'em away. They can use 'em. What's the answer?"

"Maybe," Patricia speculated, "that's the Costa Lindan navy. How gorgeously intriguing!"

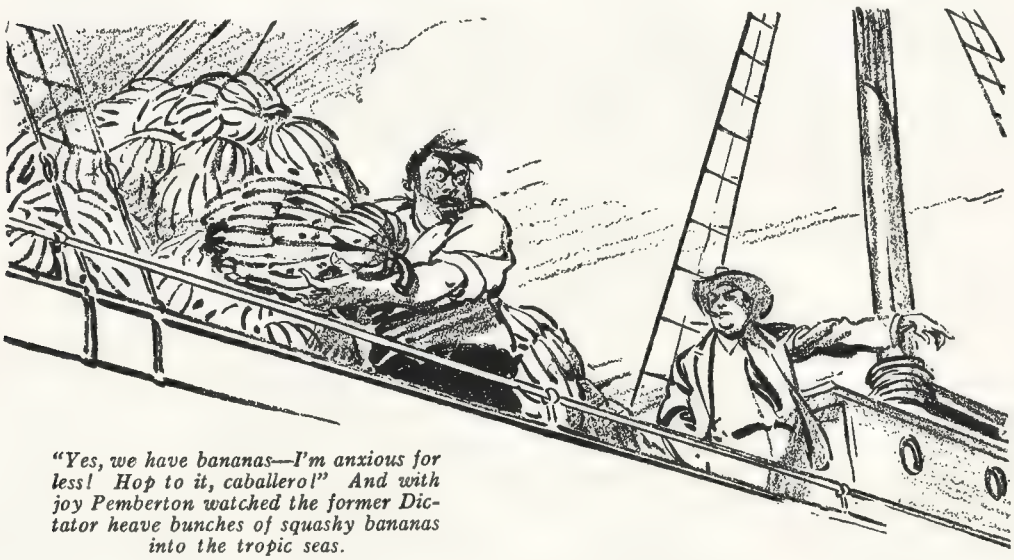
"Ay aint likin' de look of it, whatever it is," said Skipper Holmstad, wrinkling his brows. "It don't look friendly-like. An' if Ay aint mistaken, dat faller in de bow is old General Rapaz, himself."

"Rapaz?" echoed Pemberton. "The Dictator?"

"Nobody else," Holmstad asserted. "Can't you see him, now?"

Pemberton could now, indeed, see el Zopilote. So could everybody else. No mistake about it, in this world. At the bow of the smoky and dirty old tub stood

the august Dictator of Costa Linda, and none other. He looked a trifle bowlegged now, as most men do who have spent nearly all their lives in the saddle. On his brass buttons and his several pounds of medals the hot sun winked and twinkled, as also on the blade of the naked saber he was brandishing. And now, as all hands stood gaping with wonder, the Dictator's hoarse bellow, in broken English, came drifting across those lovely tropic waters:



"Yes, we have bananas—I'm anxious for less! Hop to it, caballero!" And with joy Pemberton watched the former Dictator heave bunches of squashy bananas into the tropic seas.

"Ahoooo, there! Cease and desist it. *Ahooooooo!*"

"What the Tophet?" demanded Pemberton, amazed. "In the name of all that's unholy, what does the buzzard want *now?*"

WHAT the buzzard wanted now was very speedily made clear. On, on staggered the rickety old tug, belching smoke and sparks that trailed across the limpid heavens. In it, a swarm of soldiers, beside the military staff—which is to say the *de facto* government of Costa Linda—presented a most unmistakably hostile attitude. Arms were waved, swords agitated, rifles brandished.

"My word," murmured Captain Fitzmorris. "I judge these beggars are inimical. But why? Deuced odd, eh?"

As the Costa Lindan navy (it being that, indeed) hauled closer, now the word *Libertad* became visible on her bow. The navy slowed, at a word of command barked by el Zopilote. It drifted and stopped about a quarter of a cable's-length off the starboard bow, on the other side of the yacht from the accommodation-ladder.

With a ferocious wave of his sabre, el Zopilote vociferated:

"In the name of Law and Constitución of Republic! Stop yourself from to hurl these banana at the sea!"

"What's that you've got the infernal nerve to say?" cried Pemberton.

"*Caramba!* I repeat other time. You must refrain hurling! And likewise, you must enter your esmall save-life boats, for picking up all these fruit what you have already projected! You must restore every fruit, all, entire, on those yacht of yours!"

"Pick—pick 'em *up,* again?" stammered the millionaire. "And—but—say, you know where you can go to!"

"After you, señor," grimly retorted el Zopilote. He spoke a sharp word of command. His military forces loosened the pistols in their holsters, looked to the loading of their rifles.

"As a former military man," remarked Captain Fitzmorris, "allow me to observe that our position is jolly well untenable. Might it not—ah—be well to inquire the cause of hostilities, you know? The—er—beastly *casus belli,* as it were?"

"Oh, we're going to have a war, now!" Patricia exulted. "We're going to fight the whole navy. Hooray!"

Wong Lee incontinently ducked into the galley. A sound of locks being hastily shot

became audible. Simultaneously, Tolliver turned and disappeared into the companionway. In a great hurry he vanished below. Who ever could have thought him so chicken-hearted? Skipper Holmstad masticated a very complex Swedish oath. The others grinned or frowned, according to their several dispositions, behind their bulwarks of bananas.

"Well, now, what do you make?" demanded el Zopilote, even more infuriated. "Do you Yanquis obey to me, the Law, the Constitución, or—"

"WHAT'S the idea we can't throw away our own property?" choked Pemberton. "*We* don't want these damn' bananas! Why can't we chuck 'em?"

"Chuck? Chuck? Ah, no! It is estrictly prohibit by law to chuck! This law, she is made by me!" And el Zopilote thumped his bemedaled chest. "For why? For because if that harbor is full with banana, American fruit companies refusing to come here for the business. So I—the Law—make that harbor stay clean!"

"Good idea that *something's* clean, down here!"

"Do not make the jest, señor!" warned el Zopilote. "All banana what fruit companies not wanting, she is take by one *bongo*—what you call flat-scow—and project at the ocean, twelve mile from those land here. So you must doing that!"

"*Me?*"

"You, señor! I command it. You must picking up all those banana, transporting it twelve miles and—"

"Like Sam Hill, I will! So I've been made a mutt of, have I?" demanded the infuriated millionaire, a figure of defiance in his rolled-up shirt-sleeves as he stood at the banana-battlemented rail. He waved large American fists at el Zopilote. "That tar-brushed villain at the office, there, to save the expense of dumping about 'steen tons of bananas at sea—he sold 'em to me for a dollar, did he? And I—*I'm* to do the dumping, am I? I'm in the garbage-removal business for Puerto Cerdo, am I? Not so you'd notice it, by gad!"

"What is this?" roared the Dictator, with the sun gleaming most formidably upon his brandished saber, his medals and his spurs. "The Law, what I make—you disobey him? But *canasto!* It is impossible! I—I am the General Rapaz Fulano de Tal, Supreme Dictator of Costa Linda. You must obey to me!"

Pemberton shot a swift aside at Skipper Holmstad:

"Any chance to slip our cable, shoot the engines into high, and ram him?"

"Not a chance," the Skipper growled. "Before ve gat even started, dem Spigs make us look like a basket vit' holes. Look at all dem rewolwers an' rifles. Ay tank ve gat to knuckle under."

"*Damned* if I will!" gritted Pemberton. "A flea-bitten Spig navy like that?"

"W'at you say?" roared e. Zopilote, his slight patience fraying to a single thread. "I warnin' you. If you not obeyin', I open the fire. I seize your ship. I confiscate all w'at you got on the board." He cast a hungry glance at Patricia, and added: "All!"

"You go below!" Pemberton ordered his daughter. As she resisted, he thrust her into the cabin. But hardly had he turned back to the rail, when she was out again.

"One more last time," repeated the infuriated Dictator, the veins in his neck ominously swollen. "Do you obey to me?"

A growl filtered all along the rail, behind the breastworks of bananas. Aboard the Costa Lindan navy, grins were visible—nods, glintings of cruel teeth, twistings-up of ferocious mustachios.

"Give me five minutes," shouted Pemberton, "to think it over?"

"*Mil diablos!*" the Dictator bellowed. "This is the rebellion, the high crimes and treasonings against the Republica, the Destiny and Glory of la Patria! What? Shall the sainted Fatherland be insult by bunches of bananas too ripe? Never!" He waved his sword. "Soldiers, heroes! W'en I command three, fire upon the proud, insolent enemy! One—two—"

B-o-o-n-g!

FIRE, indeed, but not from the Costa Lindan navy!

The fire, the detonation, shot from the bow of the *Picaroon.* This formidable discharge leaped from a speedily constructed embrasure of banana-bunches, that concealed the yacht's brass saluting-cannon.

As this cannon, which the absent Tolliver had been secretly and very hastily overloading with a double charge of powder and with the only projectile he could lay hands on—a large monkey-wrench from the engine-room—as this cannon leaped back and catapulted Tolliver into a mountain of squashed bananas, lots happened aboard the Costa Lindan navy.

For the monkey-wrench, well-aimed, crashed fair into the middle of the navy's rusty old boiler, and—

That boiler, letting go with an ear-shattering *bang!* completely disrupted the navy.

Iron, wood, pieces of funnel and machinery, rifles, Spigs, sabers, steam, revolvers, smoke, medals and miscellaneous débris flew high, wide and mighty.

In the midst of them General Rapaz Fulano de Tal executed a confused and spinning parabola, and vanished in a churning froth of foam.

Stunned, deafened, amazed, Pemberton and his party could only gasp and stare.

An immense echo rolled back from the town. Shouts were heard there, wild cries as though of exultation.

As the sea grew quiet, the last fragments of the navy sank. The heads of men grew visible, striking madly out for shore. Some, perhaps, might dodge the barracudas and really get there—to meet what? What else but the firing-squads of the freshly born dictatorship of the rival General Voraz Quisiera Tenerlo?

Political changes are abrupt, down there!

LARGEST of all the swimmers was el Zopilote. But he was making heavy weather of it. Weighted with all his bandoliers, sword-belt and scabbard, revolvers and medals, as an insurance-risk just then he rated about minus zero. To reach the shore was obviously impossible. His one chance of life, his only chance, lay in the *Picaroon*. But even this would have failed had he not laid hold of a large bunch of bananas. This he adjusted with great presence of mind, across his medaled chest, in the manner of water-wings. Thus unheroically supported, he thrashed his way like a slightly mulatto porpoise toward the yacht of the hated Yanquis. His spurs and gauntlets whipped foam.

"Ay, mi madre!" he gulped, spouting water with every violent splash. "I die for la Patria! *Socorro*—assistance!"

"Stand clear!" shouted Pemberton, too busy and excited even to thank Tolliver for his brilliant artillery-work. "Get out o' here, you—you buzzard! Beat it!"

The ex-dictator still struggled yachtward. On shore, violent activities had become marked. Rifle-fire spattered. White-clad figures ran; others pursued. A flag fell. Another ran up on the pole of the Aduana. Cheers wafted.

"Por Dios!" the half-drowned Don Rapaz supplicated. "I perish me! Aid!"

He kicked his way round the bow of the yacht.

"Ve can't let de poor devil drownd, sir," remarked Skipper Holmstad. "Ve gat to rescue him, much as ve radder not!"

Thus saying, he leaned over the rail and caught a boat-hook into the collar of the unhappy General's uniform and dragged him along most ingloriously toward the accommodation-ladder.

"Señores," gulped Don Rapaz, "this water, she is filled of barracudas which devour the leg. Haul me upward! Succor!"

"Succor, eh?" Pemberton flung at him. "That's what you wanted to make o' me, a sucker! But—" He paused, while all along the rail, on the off-shore side of the yacht, beamed faces of pleased expectancy. Even Wong Lee ventured out, nodding and smiling. "But before I decide whether to haul you out, or let the barracudas devour the leg, as you say—"

"Not much time for talkin', sir," put in the Skipper. "Dey're comin' from de town a'ready, vit' anoder tug!"

Only too true. Already a tug with a very tall funnel had put out from the wharf. Other and smaller boats were following. Louder and nearer drifted cries, shouts, vociferations.

"My word, what's all this?" Fitzmorris queried. "Another jolly old attack, you know, or—"

"Looks more like a celebration to me," said Tolliver. *"This* bunch of Spigs seems very hilarious. I reckon they're coming out to kiss us, for throwing a monkey-wrench into the government."

"Ve better gat clear, anyhow," the Skipper judged. "You never can tell, down here—an' ve sure did sink it, de navy!" He soggily towed Don Rapaz to the ladder. With a vast effort, the ex-dictator hauled himself up this, dripping brine, medals, cartridges and supplications.

ON reaching the deck, a drizzling and dejected figure of misery, he caught sight of the now rapidly-approaching tug, and uttered a yelp of terror.

"My enemies!" he gasped. *"Cielos!* And I am now helpless. Let us depart!"

"Enemies?" asked Pemberton, while all clustered round. "What enemies?"

"The opposition party—Liberalistas!" the Don panted, bug-eyed with terror. "I will be execute! Or, worse—if they see me

fished up from amid those banana, like garbages, the entire Republic will laugh itself of me!" The Don paled, struck his breast with a water-soaked gauntlet. "To die on the field of the honor, yes, it is good. But to perish of those ridicule—ah, no, the Espanish *caballero* no can endure it! Let us depart!"

"You surrender?"

"With grand pleasure, señor! Behold!" He drew his pistols, handed them over to Pemberton. "Now I am one prisoner of the war. I demanding that honorable treatments!"

"Yeah, you're a prisoner, all right," Pemberton grimly assented. "But the banana-law you made, when you were Dictator, set me back a couple of thousand pesos. How about that?"

Don Rapaz thrust a hand into his inside pocket, to produce some of the wad he always carried; but Pemberton with a sudden laugh, exclaimed:

"Never mind, Don. Keep your jack. You'll probably need it before you're through. It's worth twice the money to see you hooked up from that floating garbage-heap. We'll let the two thousand go as wages."

"Wages, wages? *Caballero!*" And the Don straightened up, in his drenched uniform. His eye flashed. "What you meaning, wages—to me? Never!"

"Oh, yes, wages," Pemberton reaffirmed. "You're going to work your way, all right, to our next port. Part of your job will be helping our Chinese cook—washing dishes, walloping pots, and so on. Part will be—"

"BEG pardon, sir," interrupted the Skipper, "but dat bunch comin' now, dey might have a cannon. Ve better move on!"

"All right, Skipper. Get under way, at once!"

Holmstad gave snappy orders. The sailors leaped. Impeded though they were by ubiquitous bananas, they still remained efficient. A winch began to clatter, the anchor-chain to come up clacking and a-drip. Holmstad swung into the pilot-house. The engine-room telegraph ratcheted. A bell clanged. Vibrations began to shake the hull. The *Picaroon* moved forward, swung her bow to the sea.

"Ahoy!" a voice from the tug rang over the harbor. "This is—new government! We owe all to brave, victorious Americanos! We offer rewards!"

"Por Dios!" exclaimed Don Rapaz. "It is the trickery, to detain you, to captivate me! *Vamos!"* He shivered violently.

"Oh, isn't this just too thrilling?" cried the girl. "I'm positively all in a twitter!"

"Wages?" the Don repeated his previous question. "Washing dishes and pots? For me, the ex-dictator of Costa Linda? *Ay de mi!* You make of a Espanish Don, your eslave?"

"I should say not!" laughed Pemberton, as the yacht laid her bowsprit on the harbor exit. "Slaves don't get wages. But you've already got 'em. And your job, besides what I've said, will be—"

"What, señor?" The ex-general drew himself up proudly. "As your secretary? Your—"

"No. You've got about ten or eleven tons of bananas, some of 'em quite ripe, to clean off this yacht. Savvy? Bananas, aloft and alow. So the quicker you get to it, the sooner I'll give you a drink and a cheroot. Till then, nothing doing. Get busy!"

"Me? General Rapaz—"

"I'll give you just one minute to decide," declared the millionaire, hauling out his watch. "Sling bananas overboard or overboard you go yourself to the barracudas and the Liberalistas—I don't know which are the worst!"

Silence fell. Man eyed man, grim-jawed, determined. Into the silence broke a wailing minor chant from the galley—

"Mo chin tien wo men yu shan chao!"

The yacht, gathering full speed, quivered beneath her heavy freight.

"Time's up!" suddenly exclaimed Pemberton. "Well?"

"I yield me," the Don replied, lowering his head. A tear gleamed in his proud eye. "I humble me. But it is only for my great love of la Patria. I fling those garbages at the brine, so that I may survive. I shall return." He waved a dramatic arm. "I shall yet in the future liberate—"

"All right! But begin liberating this yacht from garbage, right now in the present! My cook is correct. Yes, we have bananas. I'm anxious for less. Hop to it, *caballero!"*

With a chaste joy almost equal to that of the Liberalistas—who though now far astern still kept binoculars trained on the proceedings—Horatio Pemberton watched the bemedaled former Dictator one by one heave ponderous bunches of squashy bananas overboard into the sparkling loveliness of those swift-fleeing tropic seas.

TOBY

By REG DINSMORE

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The lively story of a Maine woods bear-cub and his adventures with varied mankind—by the author of "The Fight Before Christmas."

The city folks, especially the children, went daffy over the lovable little devil.

TOBY was just a roadside minstrel—one of those droll little forest clowns whose antics help to amuse and entertain the thousands of scenery-hungry tourists whose cars clutter the highways of northern New England from pussywillow time in spring until the heavy frosts of autumn. But, unlike the general run of his kind, Toby did not need the restraining influence of collar and chain to keep him from shuffling away to the fastnesses of his native mountains whose green slopes came down to the very door of his master's roadside refreshment-stand. He stayed because—well, because it was the only home he had ever known, and because he loved ice-cream and Dan Verrill.

Perhaps Dan might never have had to put collar and chain on the cub if only a couple of hard-boiled citizens who knew far less of bear nature than they did of the gentle art of swinging a blackjack, had let the bear alone. This fine pair of yeggs failed to realize that when a bear awakes in the springtime, after its long winter sleep, whatever took place the fall before is just as fresh in Bruin's mind as though it happened last evening. That was a lesson in natural history that they were destined to learn. And experience has many times been called a hard teacher.

Dan Verrill's place is at the foot of the steep, four-mile grade that climbs up through picturesque Grafton Notch. He lives alone on a small farm and runs a little two-by-four ice-cream and hot-dog stand by the side of the road. In the summer, when the tourists are thick, he makes more by selling them refreshments, oil and gas than he makes from his farm for the rest of the year. Dan is a hustler, and knows what the city folks like. Each spring he makes it a point to tap some of the sugar maples in his back pasture and boil down the sap to delicious sugar. Then he molds the sugar into little cakes, wraps each cake in birch-bark, ties the wrapper with a blade of sweet-grass, and later on sells them in his store. The tourists pick them off as children do lollypops.

ONE morning Dan went up to his sap-camp to "sugar off" a batch of syrup he had left in the pan the night before. He found that sometime in the night a bear had been to the camp, smelled the sweet stuff inside, climbed a corner of the camp, and entered through the trapdoor in the

roof where the steam from the pans escapes. Inside, the camp was a mess—pan tipped off the arch, syrup spilled. Evidently the bear had eaten as much as it could hold, wallowed in the rest as a hog wallows in a mud-puddle, and then had dug its way out under a sill and gone back to the mountains.

Naturally, Dan was mad. Back he went to the house, got his rifle, and started after the bear.

There was a little snow on the ground—one of those sticky spring snows that oft-times fall after the farmer has planted his early peas—and it was easy for Dan to follow the bear. Far back on the northern slope of old Saddleback Mountain the track disappeared in a hole in the ledges. Dan looked about a bit, found where the bear had emerged from the same hole earlier in the night, and came to the conclusion that he had found a den.

Dan Verrill is a small man—one of the quiet, unassuming kind; but what he lacks in size is made up in nerve. He had put in nearly a day following this bear. A good bear-skin meant a twenty-dollar bill—pay for his spilled syrup and some besides. Dan twisted up a birch-bark torch, and pushing the flaming bundle of bark and his rifle ahead of him, crawled into the hole in the ledges.

He squirmed his way through the narrow passage for perhaps ten feet, pausing now and then to listen and peer past his torch into the shadows ahead. Suddenly he was stopped by a throaty growl. Lambent eyes reflected the torch-flame. Dan wiggled the heavy .45-70 into position and pulled the trigger, then scrambled hurriedly from the cave.

Outside, Dan calmly filled his pipe, sat down on a rock and smoked it out. He knew that he couldn't have missed at that close range, but he also knew that many a good man has been mercilessly mauled, even killed, by a supposedly dead bear. . . . .

Dan listened at the mouth of the hole. There was no sound from within. He constructed another birchbark torch and crept carefully into the cave.

The bear was dead.

A newly killed bear slips around inside its hide like a loose-tied bag of sand—awkward creatures to handle. Dan had to work like a beaver to get the bear to daylight, but the knowledge that a bear's fur is at its best in the spring of the year gave him greater strength. Once outside, however, and with the bear turned on its back ready to skin, Dan felt almost sorry he had killed it. For the first time he discovered that it was a she-bear, and was suckling young.

Like many hard-bitten men, Dan Verrill has a tender heart. Now that he had killed the mother bear, he felt a keen responsibility for the cubs. So after he had the hide off the old bear, he built another torch and crawled into the hole in the ledges again. Way back in the far end of the hole he found a nest of leaves and other trash gathered from the forest floor. In the nest was a single cub.

NO young animal is more helpless than a bear cub—nor any smaller, compared to the size of its parents. The cub that Dan Verrill found in the cave was no larger than a week-old puppy. When he picked up the hairless little fellow, the cub cuddled down in his hands and began sucking at the end of one of his fingers. Dan's heart went out to the little creature.

"Gol-durn it!" he told the cub. "If I'd 'a' knowed yer maw had a fambly, I wouldn't 'a' plugged her! Now I've gotta be nursemaid to a bear pup, I suppose!"

Dan crawled out of the hole, put the cub in the front of his shirt where it would be warm, shouldered the hide of the old bear and started for home.

A month later, money wouldn't have tempted Dan Verrill to part with the cub. With the good cow's milk Dan gave him, the young bear grew and thrived like a little pig. As soon as he got his eyes open and started crawling around Dan's kitchen, he began his droll deviltry. A bear cub is a joker, a jester, a scream; and Toby, as Dan called him, lived up to his heritage. Dan Verrill laughed more at that bear cub that spring than he had laughed before in twenty years!

And then came summer—and the tourists. Toby, by now, was quite a cub. He had never known anything but kindness, and he was just as clever as a Newfoundland puppy and twice as playful. The city folks, especially the children, went daffy over the lovable little devil. They started right in buying ice-cream cones and bottled pop for the cub. It was nothing for Toby to smack down twenty or thirty cones of ice-cream in a single day, and in no time he had learned to tip up a bottle and drink it down without spilling a drop. If the tourists failed to buy sweets for him, he climbed right into their cars and panhandled

them until they did. That little pleading whine of Toby's was a hard thing to ignore.

Of course Dan Verrill saw right away that he had a miniature gold-mine in the cub, and he scattered signs up and down the road, twenty miles each way, telling folks to stop and see the bear. They stopped—and Dan's business doubled and trebled.

That was a wonderful summer for Dan Verrill! Go past his place any time of day, and there would be from one to a dozen cars parked in his yard and a bunch of folks crowded around some central attraction peeking over each other's shoulders for a better view. It was a safe bet that in the center of that crowd was Toby, cocked up on his round little buttocks, head tipped comically sideways, little eyes half closed in sheer contentment as he crunched down a cone of ice-cream. Toby never lapped them out as a dog will—just two champs of his jaws, a swallow; the cone was gone and he was teasing for the next one.

In the beginning Dan Verrill worried considerably for fear Toby would bite or scratch some child when they passed him a cone. Not Toby! He had manners. He would take sweet stuff from the smallest child's hand as gently as a woman, and they might rub his ears and pat him as much as they chose without eliciting a snarl or an unpleasant look. Word of his gentleness circulated up and down the road from Boston to Montreal, and Dan nearly ran his legs off waiting on trade.

Came Labor Day, and as is the custom of tourists, they began drifting back to the cities. Trade at Dan's place fell off rapidly. Still, by expert panhandling, Toby managed to wheedle a few sweets out of the occasional callers at Dan's. But two or three ice-creams, and a couple of bottles of strawberry soda, doesn't mean much to a growing bear that has been in the habit of destroying something like three dollars' worth of such fodder daily—and so Dan had to begin feeding Toby.

He concocted huge puddings for the cub—puddings of corn-meal porridge and meat scraps, the same as he fed his foxhounds, but Toby turned up his nose at them and whined for chocolate ice-cream. Dan worried for fear that the cub would starve himself to death before he could break him of the ice-cream habit; then he hit upon the expedient of camouflaging the pudding with a deluge of heavy molasses. Toby lapped it up with great gusto, and Dan drew a breath of relief. He knew that a bear should have a deep layer of fat beneath his hide before he denned for the winter. It's what they live on through those long cold months.

Toby, with a coughing, sneezing, choking roar, went after Streve like a whirlwind.

TOWARD the last of November Toby's naps grew longer and longer. Sometimes he would curl up behind the kitchen stove and sleep the clock twice around. He was getting ready to hibernate. Dan realized that hibernating behind a kitchen range was not the regular thing for a black bear. Besides, he would have to move the cub every time he swept the kitchen. Something must be done about it.

So Dan dug into the side of the sand-bank across the dooryard and built Toby a snug little house there. After it was complete, he shoveled sand in against the back

and side walls, and filled the house full of clean oat-straw. Snug, warm and dry, it was an ideal place for Toby's long nap.

Dan coaxed the cub into the place with some peanuts, and as soon as Toby saw the lay-out, he knew it was just what he needed. He at once began champing up straw and fixing himself a nest. Dan grinned, rubbed Toby's ears, and went off about his work.

Toby did not come out much more that fall. Once in a while, when the day happened to be nice and sunny, and a car pulled into Dan's yard for a fill of gas, he would amble out of his house, shake the straw from his fur, and start the old panhandling game again. But he wasn't the finished worker that he was in the summer—he was too sleepy.

But Toby could wake up if the occasion required—and mighty quick, at that!

ONE day a man stopped at Dan's for gas. In his car he had one of those white, bow-legged, English bulls. The dog hopped down from the car and started exploring the yard, as dogs will. Dan noticed him.

"Ugly-lookin' customer, that!" said Dan with a nod toward the bull.

"You bet!" grinned the man. "And he's just as ugly as he looks. I keep him chained in my barn at home. Last week he slipped his collar, went into my linter and killed a two-year-old heifer for me, dang him!"

"Nice dog!" commented Dan, and went on pumping gas.

The dog trotted about, making that snoring noise in his nose as those undershot dogs do; then, spying Toby's house, he waddled over to investigate. Toby was inside, having one of his long naps.

The white dog pushed his pugnacious nose in at the door, sniffed once or twice, and walked in as large as a ton of wool. One second later he came flying out, his screw tail tucked tightly between his legs and part of the skin of his face hanging in shreds down over the end of his nose. Toby had slapped him just once!

IT was just before Thanksgiving, one of those warm Indian summer days when the dull gray of leafless hardwood forests is softened by amber sunlight, and when distant valleys swim in languorous purple shadows. Toby had been sleeping for a week, but the warm sun on the roof of his house awoke the cub, and he loafed outside to hang around Dan, who was banking his store against the cold weather that was soon to come.

Down through the Notch came a car. It rolled into Dan's yard and stopped by the gas-pump. In the big sedan were two young men—young men whose furtive eyes and nervous, slangy speech failed to correspond with their expensive fur coats and the high-priced car they drove.

One of them got out of the car. "Coupla quarts of oil," he told Dan.

As Dan was pouring the oil into the car, Toby heaved himself onto his feet from where he was lying in the sun by the side of the store, and slouched over to the stranger. He walked up to the man, sat up on his haunches, his forepaws hanging down like flippers, and began his begging—panhandling.

"Why the pose?" inquired the stranger, waving a cigarette-stained hand at the cub.

"Oh, he does that to everybody," grinned Dan. "Teasin' fer a bottle o' pop, I guess. He kin hold a bottle in his paws an' drink outa it jest as good as you or I kin."

Dan took the five-dollar bill that the young fellow passed him, fumbled in his pockets for change, and finding that he did not have enough with him, went into the store after the balance.

THE man sitting in the car rolled down a window and passed out a bottle.

"Drinks pop, does he? Here, Streve, give him a shot of this."

The one called Streve took the pint bottle of colorless stuff and held it toward the cub.

Toby grabbed the bottle with both paws, tipped back his head, closed his eyes, and opened his mouth wide. Then, with Streve still holding to the bottle for fear the bear would spill it, Toby raised the bottle and tipped it bottom up over his mouth.

When the raw high-test alcohol touched Toby's sensitive palate, he struck like a flash. Two of his razor-edged claws hooked deep into Streve's wrist and plowed twin furrows, parallel gouges from wrist to knuckles. Streve screamed and backed away. Toby, with a coughing, sneezing, choking roar, went after him like a whirlwind. Streve raced around the car and dived in the open door—minus one of his pant-legs. Out came Dan, dragged the cub away, and shut him in the store.

Streve's friend bound up his bleeding hand with a handkerchief. Streve flourished an automatic and swore he would shoot the cub. Dan picked up the bottle,

smelled it, walked to the store. In a moment he came out with his old .45-70 in the crook of his elbow and leaned up against the door-jamb. . . . . Streve and his friend drove away.

IT took Toby three days to recover from his fit of temper. Even then he grouched around the place with a half-growl rumbling deep in his throat. Dan decided he had better hitch the cub up before some one was injured. So he set a tall stake some twenty feet out in front of Toby's house, fastened a light chain to it that was long enough to allow the cub to go into his den, buckled an old hame-strap about the cub's neck for a collar, and felt safer about Toby.

Toby had never had a collar on before. For two days and nights he worked in a futile effort to get it off. The thing took his mind from his trouble with Streve. Then he got sleepy, forgot his collar, crawled into his house and curled up for the winter

After a week or so Dan was satisfied that the bear had really began his long sleep, so he stuffed the doorway of Toby's house full of straw that would keep the snow from blowing in and still give him plenty of ventilation. Snow came and drifted over the little house until no one would have suspected that it was there.

ALMOST everyone has a hobby. With some it is fishing; the next fellow may be a golf-bug, and the next may get much enjoyment from a radio set. But Dan Verrill's particular playthings were gold coins. Please do not picture Dan as a miser. He was not. The last shirt he had was yours if you needed it. Nevertheless Dan loved to sit down of an evening, after he had closed the store and drawn the curtains and run those clinking yellow coins through his fingers as a boy plays with marbles. Folks said that in his younger days Dan had been a cow-poke on a big ranch in southern Nevada. Nevada is "hard money" country. Perhaps the feel and glitter of those bright coins brought back pleasant memories of the old days to Dan.

It was common knowledge up and down the road that in the little safe at Dan's store was something like twenty-five hundred dollars in golden fives, tens and double eagles.

Dan's friends worried considerably about that gold. They told Dan what a fool he was to keep that amount of money around the house, when the country was full of crooks who would bump a man off for a tenth part of that boodle—but Dan just pooh-poohed at their warnings. . . . .

The long winter wore itself away. With the coming of the robins and the bluebirds, the little river that tumbles down through the Notch awoke and chuckled at the pussywillows that hung above its swift current. Although there was considerable ice left in the road, cars whizzed up and down through the Notch, and Dan began selling gas and oil again.

Toby the cub was still sleeping.

One evening a car came to a stop in front of Dan's. Two men, the collars of their big fur coats turned up about their faces, got out of the car and came into the store.

"Box of matches," said one.

Dan turned to the shelf behind the counter for the matches. When he faced around again, he was looking straight into the muzzle of a sinister automatic.

"Open that safe—damned quick! No wise stuff now, Jasper, if yer want to keep on livin'!" the yegg snarled.

DAN did just what any one would do with sudden death grimacing at them—he opened the safe.

The other man cleaned out the safe, then smashed the till in Dan's cash-register and rifled that also.

"Walk over to that chair! Sit down—put your arms behind you!" barked the one with the automatic.

Dan did as he was told, and the crook who had taken the money from the safe pulled some pieces of rope from the pocket of his fur coat and tied Dan, hand and foot, to the heavy chair. Then, with the crank of Dan's gasoline-pump, they smashed the telephone instrument on the wall and went out into the night.

Dan heard the door of their car slam, heard the motor start, turn slowly for a moment, then burst into a sudden roar.

"Wheels slippin' on the ice," thought Dan.

The roar of the motor ceased. One of the men got out of the car, walked around to the rear with a flashlight—and swore.

"We've lost a tire-chain," Dan heard him tell the driver. "We'll never get up this icy four-mile hill without one. I'll see what I can find that we can wrap around the tire."

In came the yegg who had held the gun on Dan.

"We want a long chain, or a rope—an' I don't mean maybe!"

Dan had a hunch.

"Long chain on that post out there in the yard," he told the crook.

The fellow ran out, and through the window Dan could see his light bobbing about over by where Toby's house was still covered by the old snowdrift. Dan wished that the cub was a full-grown grizzly, and that the yeggs would wake him. He was somewhat disappointed when he heard the man with the light shout to the one in the car:

"Hey, bring over those big cutting pliers there under the front seat! One end of this chain is fastened to a post and the other end is frozen into a snowdrift. Hustle!"

The man in the car ran across the yard with the nippers, and in a moment they were back with the chain, winding it on a rear tire at the far side of the car.

DAN fought his ropes with all his strength. If only he could get loose and reach the old rifle that lay behind the counter, he'd make that pair of yeggs look like sieves! But the ropes refused to give. Then Dan saw something that caused him to forget all about fighting the knots that held him.

Across a patch of light that streamed out into the dooryard from the store window, a shadow moved, a shaggy shadow—Toby!

Broken straw and snow were clinging to the black fur of the cub where he had dug himself out through the snowdrift that covered his house. Two feet of chain dangled from his collar.

For half a minute the big cub stood there in the patch of light, swinging his head from side to side, trying the air with his nose; then Dan saw him lumber over to the car and climb silently in at the open door. Ten seconds later the two yeggs hurried around from behind the car scrambled in, slammed the door, and went off up the road with a roar of wide-open throttle.

Then Dan went to work on those ropes. In twenty minutes he had rubbed the rope that held his wrists on a sharp edge of the chair-back until it parted. The rest was easy.

JUST as he got clear, there came a scratch and a plaintive little whine at the door. Dan sprang to the door and flung it open, and in swaggered Toby, as cocky as a bantam rooster.

Just behind one of the cub's ears a trickle of blood oozed from the black fur. Dan parted the fur and found a small cut. In one end of the cut something glistened in the lamplight. Dan picked it out; it was a small splinter of shattered glass. Dan guessed what had happened. He hustled for his lantern and rifle.

THREE hundred yards above Dan's place the road swings around the shoulder of a bluff. Below the road, the bluff, a tangle of stunted brush and sharp boulders, pitches almost straight down to the river, forty feet below. It was there that Dan's lantern showed him where a car had swerved wildly, chipping the ice of the ruts into feathery powder with its tire-chains, and had smashed the single guard-rail beside the road as if it had been a match. He swung his lantern over the edge of the bank and peered down, but could see nothing. Then above the rattle and gurgle of the stream he thought he heard some one groan.

Dan climbed down the bluff. He found the car, twisted, smashed, a hopeless wreck. The yegg who had taken the gold from the safe had crawled from the tangle somehow. Now he lay across a rock, holding his side—sick. He did not look up when Dan held the lantern close to his face—just lay there and groaned, over and over again: "Damn that bear! Damn that bear!"

"What happened?" Dan asked.

"What happened! That bear got into the car somehow—was in the back seat. We never knew he was there until we got to hitting about fifty—then he climbed over the back of the front seat and tied into the driver."

"Where's the driver?" Dan asked.

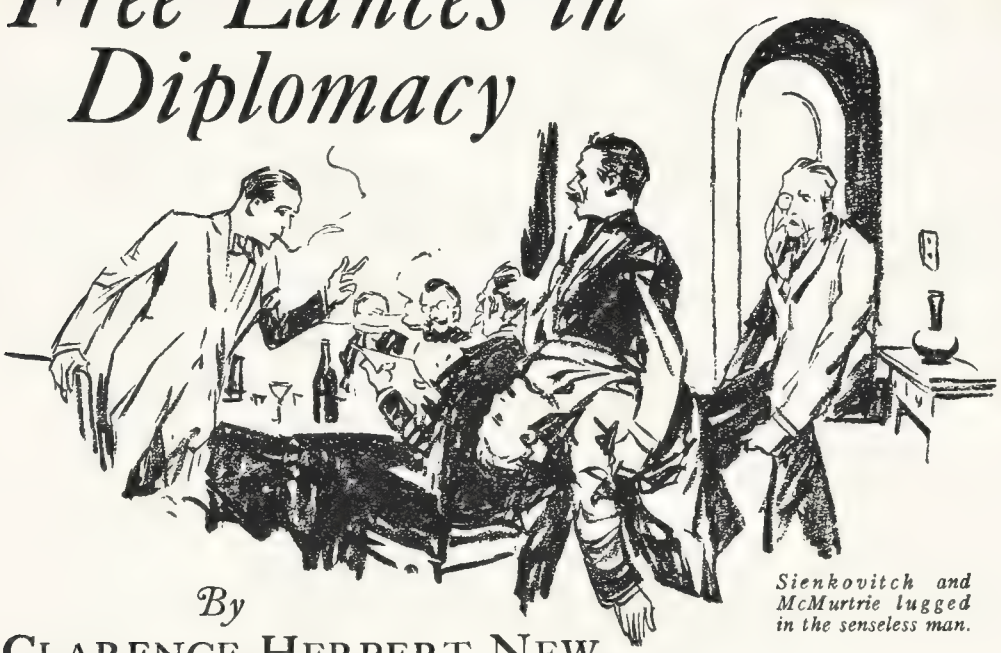
The fellow motioned toward the car.

Dan poked his lantern through a broken window of the overturned car. Behind the broken steering-wheel slumped a huddled form. An ugly bruise in the man's forehead showed where he had been thrown against a metal standard of the car's body. He was dead.

One of the dead man's hands hung limply across a torn cushion, and Dan Verrill grunted in surprise as his glance fell upon it.

From wrist to knuckles a twin pair of parallel scars showed white in the yellow light of Dan's lantern.

Free Lances in Diplomacy



Sienkovitch and McMurtrie lugged in the senseless man.

By

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Through the magic of his able pen Mr. New, in "The Mysterious Affair at Clifton Hill," enables you to participate in an exciting European drama.

Illustrated by William Molt

WESTMINSTER lay under a gray evening sky—windows in the Parliament Buildings making dimly lighted quadrangles against the deeper bluish-gray of their shadowy mass.

Dim figures were faintly visible on the terrace; there were low echoes of women's laughter, and a man's voice, suddenly more distinct than the others: "Just talking over the telephone with a man at Greenwich—he says the fog's thickening below the Isle of Dogs and creeping slowly up-river; fancy we'll be in for a night of it, presently."

Members of the Houses crowded out into the carriage-yard and drove off in various cars. Presently there appeared the tall, distinguished-looking figure of a Cabinet Minister. He acknowledged friendly greetings from the chatting groups as he stepped into his landaulet. The Minister, a man of undeniable popularity because of his ability and personal charm, was clearly defined inside his car, as it drove off, by the ceiling-lamp which he switched on for a moment to look at his watch and light a cigarette; then he became invisible, as the machine disappeared in the gray twilight.

As the landaulet bowled along toward Hyde Park, a brief order to the chauffeur through the speaking-tube sent the car in a northerly direction, and it was soon threading its way through the narrower streets in the neighborhood of St. John's Wood. It had suddenly occurred to His Lordship that he would drop in at the studio of an old friend—perhaps dine with him.

By this time, the air was thickening with the approaching fog, and the arc-lights were becoming dim. Under one of these, in the narrow street, the car approached another at the curb from which three men were getting out. While still eighty feet distant, a low word—"Park!"—in the chauffeur's ear made him hastily but softly jam on his brakes and pull over a few doors below the other car. He sat there motionless in the darkness and increasing fog—as did the man inside, who kept the glowing tip of his cigarette concealed.

THE building before which the other car had left its three passengers—afterward driving away—was one of the older, more substantially built apartment-houses, five stories in height, with a frontage of eighty

feet on the narrow street. On the front of the apartment-building were four groups of iron fire-escapes, the lower grating of each having its final ladder hauled up and hooked so that it could not be reached from the sunken basement-area or the sidewalk—though an active man could have managed to step across two window-sills from the entrance-steps and secure a hold on the two or three feet of iron ladder depending from the lower grating.

In a few moments another car drove up, depositing two more men whose faces could be but dimly made out under the entrance-lights. They had scarcely disappeared through the doors when a taxi stopped just back of the waiting car—and drove off again after its fare had got out.

This man passed so close to the open window of the waiting car that his face could be perceived with fair certainty.

The man inside the car muttered to himself: "Captain Leigh of the Foreign Office, by Jove! Now, I wonder what the dev—" And he leaned forward to watch the other.

The F. O. man risked no chance of attracting attention by any uncertain movements. With a quick glance up and down to see if anyone were approaching, he went up the steps as if about to let himself in with a key—but instead he stepped quickly but surely across the intervening window-sills, drew himself up on the fire-escape, climbed rapidly to the third floor,—where lights had just flashed up in two of the windows beyond the grating,—pushed up the window beyond, which gave directly on to the grating, and disappeared. He was out of sight in the fog as he reached the second floor—but the man in the car knew he had been following the recent arrivals and was quite certain which apartment they were in.

Reaching into a concealed pocket in the upholstery of the car, the watcher drew out a heavy-calibered automatic with a silencer screwed upon the muzzle. He slipped the magazine out of the hollow butt to see if it was full, and dropped it into the side pocket of his topcoat. Then he swiftly changed his hat for a cloth cap—drew, with the aid of a small mirror, half a dozen fine lines upon his face with a grease-pencil—completely altering the appearance of his features—and said softly to the chauffeur:

"That was Captain Leigh, Sabub—he may need help before he gets out of that place! Wait right here for me! . . . . If I don't come out in two or three hours, go home after Abdool and Lammy. It'll be Joseph McMurtrie's bachelor apartm'nt—if this is Clifton Hill, an' I fancy it is."

IN a flat on the third floor, the three men who had first arrived were seated around a long table in the larger room. McMurtrie, M.P., was at the head of it. In a few moments they were joined by the other two and by a young woman who came along from a rear apartment on the same floor.

"You're sure that Sienkovitch and Pralov will turn up, Mac?" asked one of the first arrivals.

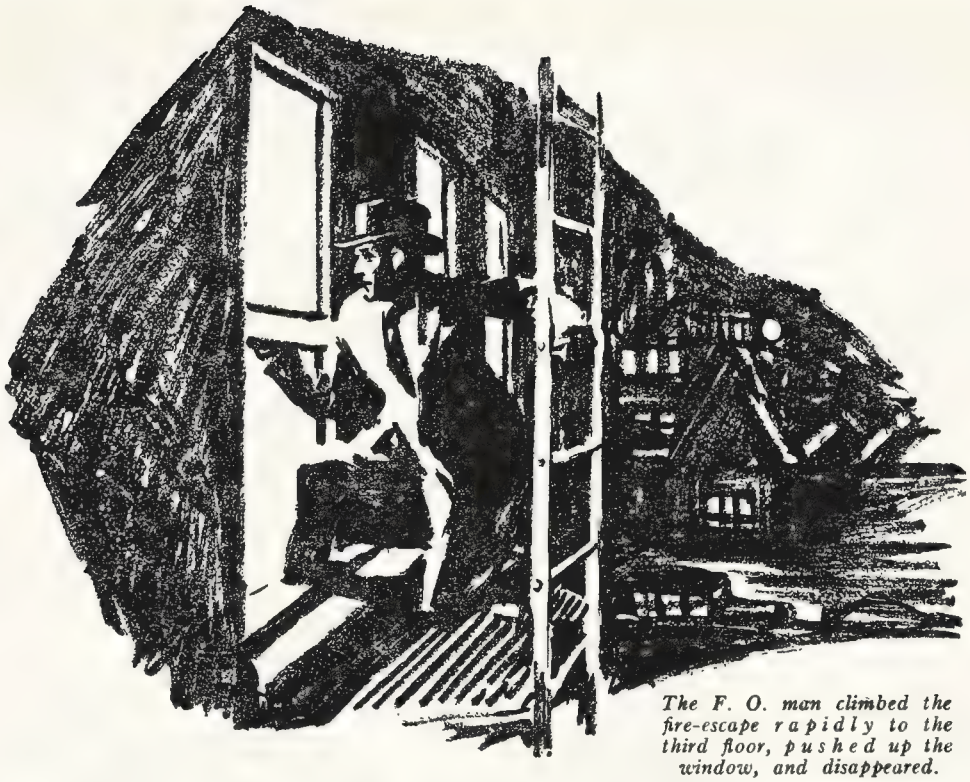
"Unless they've been arrested—yes; because it's decidedly for their interest not only to work with us but to have us work with *them*," replied McMurtrie. "It's deuced odd that with all the Russians in the United Kingdom they can't seem to understand the necessity for caution in what they do and say here! Just because the British Governm'nt doesn't stand every suspect up against a wall in some filthy cellar and shoot him, they refuse to take our Secret Service and Scotland Yard seriously—fancy they can openly hobnob with men known to be under close espionage, an' talk nihilism in our restaurants, without attracting serious attention to themselves.

"Makes it deuced diffic'lt to work with 'em because they're so damned contemptuous about British law—likely to drag any or all of us under suspicion. If they'd use a bit of caution, we'd get a powerful machine in working order before Governm'nt an' the Conservatives got wind of it. Rather important that we do pull off this conference tonight—I understand that Sienkovitch has a new gas and a new type of plane which would be immensely useful in any big show-down."

While McMurtrie had been talking, the bell from the street entrance had rung—and his valet had pressed the button which opened the lower door. After a few moments two men were admitted, whose general appearance was conventional enough to attract no attention in the dining-room or lounge of the Carlton, where they were stopping, and whose English was so good that there was no trace of accent, unless they grew careless.

"Well, gentlemen, you see we arrive according to agreement," remarked the older of the two. "You have further information concerning a general election?"

"That may come at any time, Sienkovitch—or it may be postponed indefinitely,"



The F. O. man climbed the fire-escape rapidly to the third floor, pushed up the window, and disappeared.

replied McMurtrie. "I fancy, however, that we are almost in position to force an election very soon if we decide it's to our advantage. By the way—are you working in other countries as persistently as here?"

"Yes and no. It is like this: In America, at present, labor has not enough of the grievance—wages are too high. There is much unemployment—oh, yes—and that helps. But labor is more highly paid than anywhere else in the world. The workmen fear that if they disturb business too much, they will not be able to have their pianos—their radio sets—their motor-cars. So we mark time—and keep sapping away at the foundations. It is not a condition which may be hurried! In Paris, capitalism does not intrude itself so much as to make the masses hate it—they are all bent upon reconstructing France as she was before the war. In Germany, they have paternal socialism from the top—the idea of the State before the individual constantly before them—the aristocratic class is temporarily in the background. But in England you are approaching more nearly the ideal conditions for destroying aristocracy and capital; with Irish agitation on your West and Continental changes occurring all the time on your East, your laboring masses are more nearly in the mood for a complete turnover than any others on the globe, today. Once they accomplish this, it will be a much easier job to bring about similar changes in other countries."

"Even if we carry a general election with a safe majority, you know, we'll not have Governm'nt entirely in our own hands," demurred McMurtrie. "The Conservatives will still put up a fairly strong opposition and block a good many of the more extreme radical measures—because they can depend upon some support from the masses along certain lines—"

"Provided their 'whips' and Parliamentary leaders aren't interfered with. Eh?"

"How could you 'interfere' with them—except on the floor of the House?"

"Suppose that six or eight of the most popular leaders were missing at a time when some crisis was due to occur?"

"Missing! You mean—killed?" gasped McMurtrie.

"Well—that would certainly wipe out all further obstructive tactics from them! But I think it would be unwise at first, because they'd be regarded as martyrs and everything they stood for would be emphasized instead of decreased. So—a little vacation, let us say—in a place sufficiently secluded practically to defy any search for them."

"Where could we find such a place to

keep prisoners—not too far away for them to be liberated in a moment, if necessary?"

"How much is known about Dartmoor? Is its topography completely known to the Government—to the historians—to people living in the neighborhood?"

"Governm'nt knows every foot within a three or four-mile radius around Princetown and the prison—from running down escaped convicts. Fishers and pedestrians know many of the brooks—all of the historic tors. Local farmers probably wouldn't know quite as much as that—nor the historians, either."

"And that would leave hundreds of spots where it is doubtful if anyone goes oftener than once in five years. Seven miles north of the prison, by air-line, are Tavy Head and Cut Hill—about two thousand feet elevation—heather and scrub—stiff tramp to get in there—you'd not make it and get out unless you took a compass. A mile or more east of them is a part of the moor where nobody goes—not even the wild ponies. And underneath—extending for a good half-mile—are a series of caves evidently known to the Druids but with no evidence that anyone else has been in them. I came down there in one of our planes, looking for a safe spot to run in some of our new gas for your use if matters get as far as a series of riots or general fighting. I found the entrance to those caves by sheer accident—it's a hole concealed in a clump of heather, only big enough to let in one man at a time, but it leads into spacious chambers in the underlying rock. That's one place to keep anyone we decide to retain as a guest for a while. Another is an old smugglers' cave under Achill Head on the west coast of Ireland—landlocked cove—nobody can see a craft anchored inside."

"Sounds as if both places were safe enough—I never heard of them before, and I doubt if the prison officials at Dartmoor ever did, either. The last time I saw you, Sienkovitch, you said something about that gas, and about a new type of plane you were going to let us use. What's the gas—a new type of lethal?"

"No—we've got something in that line which will be used upon the first country declaring war against Russia, but you couldn't handle it here without too much risk for yourselves. This other gas makes a person unconscious within three seconds after the first whiff gets into nose or throat. It can be thrown like a grenade, in a soft container, fired from a 'seventy-five,' or dropped from a plane, and it spreads to a hundred-foot radius within a very few seconds, but doesn't go beyond that—loses expansive force at about that distance. People who breathe it stay unconscious eight or ten hours—then recover with very little after-effect. As for the plane—it is built from a steel lighter than duralumin; it has both pontoons and landing-wheels—five thousand miles radius—both scouting and bombing sizes. We can let you have four of them and all the gas you need any time you're ready to call a general strike."

WHILE Sienkovitch was speaking, Pralov had been studying, in careless side-glances, the faces of the other five men—particularly the two who sat at the foot of the table. Without being observed he had scribbled a few Russian words upon a scrap of paper held under the edge of the table, and had shoved this note into Sienkovitch's hand in such a manner that the latter now appeared to pull it out of his trousers pocket as if it were memoranda to refresh his memory. Glancing at it carelessly, he said:

"Oh! . . . . There was another matter upon which I wished to consult you, McMurtrie—concerning certain others unknown to you gentlemen and whose communications I am not at liberty to make public. Would you be good enough to excuse McMurtrie and myself for just a few moments while I ask him some questions in another room? Yes? Thanks!"

Somewhat mystified by this unexpected request, McMurtrie led the way into a smaller adjoining room.

Closing the door, the Muscovite looked searchingly about, his glance pausing at a sofa against one of the walls. With two noiseless steps, he reached the sofa, drew from his pocket a piece of rubber hose filled with bird-shot, and brought the weapon down in a terrific blow upon something which the farther arm didn't quite conceal—and a man who had hastily concealed himself behind the end of the sofa pitched forward unconscious at their feet.

"Not from Scotland Yard, evidently," Sienkovitch muttered. "One of the Secret Service men, I suppose. May have fractured his skull, but I don't think so—we'll tie him up to prevent further interference. I heard a rustle as we came in. Probably he hadn't been here more than a moment or so, and he couldn't have heard much. But it's those two men in the other room

I want the information about—the only two we thought at first we didn't know by sight. You introduced them as Tompkins and Smith—fellow-members with you in the House. Is that straight? Are they actually M.P.'s?"

"Hmph! . . . . You can glance over the rolls if you doubt it! Smith was returned at the last election, while Tompkins has been in the House eight years."

"You consider them trustworthy members of the labor party, do you? Have you had any proofs of that?"

"Depends upon what you Russians would call 'proofs.' They've made some very radical speeches up in the Five Towns and all through the coal districts—been urgin' the Unions to come into an agreem'nt for a general strike. Why? Do you know anything against them?"

"Those two men were in Paris a month ago, attending a meeting of a certain Red Committee in the Rue Vanneau. Next day they were seen coming out of the Prefecture—and that night, four of our best men who were to have worked in England were locked up at Vincennes! Last week they had a conference with one of our bankers in Lombard Street—and afterward were seen in Downing Street, going into the Foreign Office. Tonight—at this conference, which it would be most dangerous to have your Government know anything about—we catch this spy just getting in to overhear all we say! My suggestion is—take both of them down near Tilbury in our car—cut their throats and throw their bodies into the river! Tide will be going out in a couple of hours. Eh?"

"Oh, dammit, Sienkovitch—we can't murder people here as casually as you do in Russia! Some of us would be quite sure to hang for it! You may be mistaken about them, anyway! I'd swear that both are with us up to the hilt—probably mere coincidence—or a fancied resemblance!"

"Well—I know how you English feel about such matters. We can take care of those two men ourselves if necessary. By the way—while this fellow is unconscious and none of the others can hear us—here are seven pass-books upon four well-known banking-houses—duly entered up with deposits upon certain dates going back a year or two. Each account is in the name of one of your labor unions—and six million gold rubles have been deposited altogether for your use in bringing about a general overturning of the capitalistic Government. If any questions should be raised about your accepting foreign money for your war-chest, these pass-books show that you deposited the money yourselves after collecting it from the usual sources. You see? Gets around any possible legal complications. Enables us to say that we have not contributed one penny toward your propaganda since your last Government protest reached us."

"That is very cleverly thought out, Sienkovitch! I'll see that these pass-books get into the proper hands. Now—what are we going to do with this spy?"

"We'll take him into the other room—lay him upon the table—and put it up to the others."

THERE was both surprise and sickening apprehension visible on the faces of the men in the larger room as Sienkovitch and McMurtrie lugged the senseless man in and deposited him upon the table.

Sienkovitch lighted a fresh cigar and remarked in a matter-of-fact way:

"This *mouchard* had come in through the window from the fire-escape and was hiding behind the end of a sofa—not expecting anybody to enter that room, of course. We think he'd not been in there long—but it's quite on the cards that he overheard every word of our discussion. If he did, all our plans for using the caves on Dartmoor or on Achill Head are knocked in a heap—quite out of the question. But if he's dead, that removes all risk from him—"

"Why not take him out to the Dartmoor caves and keep him there?"

"If he should escape, that gives him the lay-out of the whole place—the secret of the entrance and the level spot where our planes come down—the only one in several miles. Taking him out there means risk of discovery every mile of the way—and we'd only have to kill him in one of the caves, if we got him there. No—I've a little tube of cyanide in my pocket. It means merely prying his mouth open and letting the contents trickle down his throat. He's unconscious, now—and he'd never wake up. No blood—no wounds except a lump on his skull where I struck him. We carry him down the stairs and out to a car with his legs dangling, as if he were drunk. Drop him in the river, somewhere. Whoever fishes him out will swear to a case of drowning. Simple enough—isn't it?"

And while the others gazed in horrified fascination at the motionless body on the

table the Muscovite drew from his waistcoat pocket a little tube of colorless liquid and prepared to snap off the end of it when they had pried the man's jaws apart. A sob of terror came from the woman—who had been meaning to protest, but couldn't command her voice—and one of the men started to object, but saw that the thing would be done before he could get the words out. With bulging eyes they watched Sienkovitch's rapid but certain movements, as he took a small screwdriver and pried the man's jaws apart a quarter of an inch.

Then he swiftly snapped off the end of the sealed tube with his cigar-cutter and was moving it carefully toward the slightly parted teeth, when something struck his hand with a sharp impact heard distinctly around the room—and which sent the little tube flying against the farther wall, spraying its contents as it went—while Sienkovitch, with a moan of excruciating pain, held up the remnant of a hand which had been badly shattered by a heavy-caliber bullet. The only other sound anyone had heard was something like a low cough from the darkened room.

Before the others had sufficiently recovered from their surprise to move, or say anything, Pralov had taken a couple of steps along the wall until his fingers touched the light-switch and plunged the place into sudden darkness—broken, the next instant, by two lances of flame accompanied by the stunning reports of pistol-shots at close range.

When McMurtrie reached the switch and flooded the room with light again, Tompkins lay slumped in his chair, a dark stain gradually spreading over the left side of his waistcoat. Smith had pitched headlong upon the floor with half the left side of his skull torn off.

All supposed that most of the cyanide had gone between the unconscious spy's teeth before the mysterious bullet had struck the Russian's hand. McMurtrie's face, the woman's, and those of his two friends were as white as chalk, but he didn't altogether lose his head. Creeping around out of range, he suddenly slammed shut the door of the smaller room. Then he said in low tones:

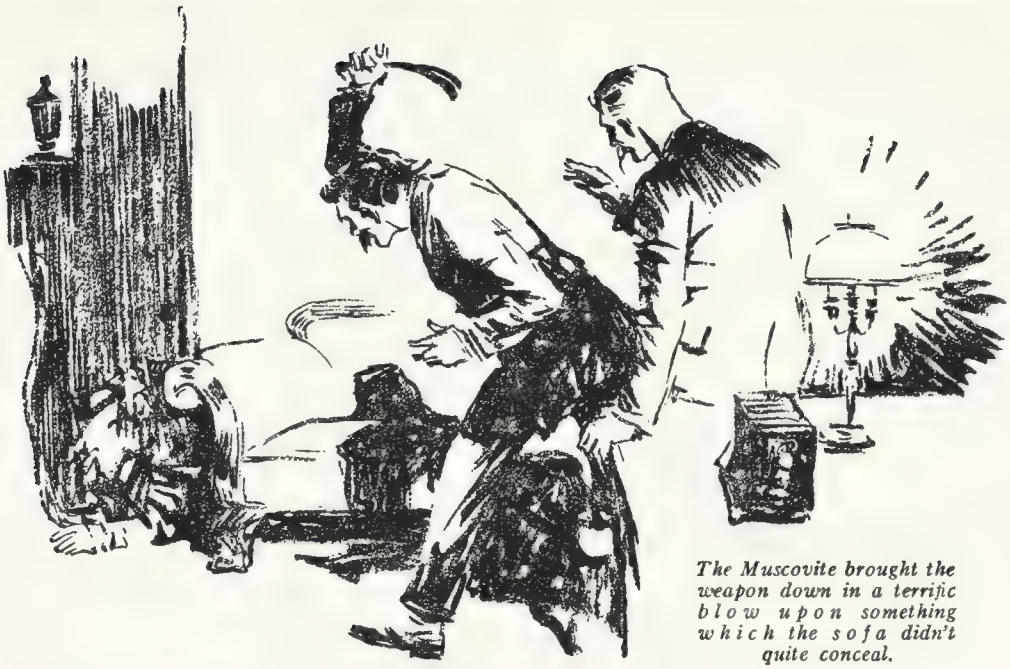
"They're in that room, or on the fire-escape—I don't know how many. At least four of us have no weapons—if the other two have any it would be suicide to go into that darkened room after them. I'm beginning to doubt that Governm'nt is behind this at all! They'd be arresting—not killing us! Mina, get back to your own apartment at once, and don't admit to anybody that you were in these rooms this evening! When we're sure those scoundrels have gone, we'll decide what had best be done. Sienkovitch, you and Pralov get out at once—disappear—get back to your hotel! I'll communicate with you in a few days, after I see what view the police are going to take of this. It will be obvious that Tompkins and Smith were in here conferring with me—also, it's most unlikely that Marshall and Woodley will be able to prove an alibi—we don't know who may have overheard them making the appointm'nt with me or seen them coming into the building. Fancy they'd best come out openly and say they were here with me, Smith and Tompkins. We'll decide just what story we're going to stick to—there's the body of this spy to account for also, you know!"

When they had gone out and closed the spring-lock of the hall door, the supposedly dead man on the table rolled over on one elbow and was struggling to get his feet over the edge, just as a tall figure in a topcoat silently opened the door from the little room. To his great surprise, the man slashed away the napkins from around his elbows and wrists—speaking in whispers:

"Rather near thing, Leigh! I feared at first that a drop or two of the cyanide *had* gone between your teeth—that brute was moving as rapidly and surely as a surgeon! Chafe your wrists and arms! We must be down those fire-escapes before the rotters come back here! Come along! I'll help you down the ladders!"

CAPTAIN LEIGH had been in too many hair-raising predicaments to get excited or lose his head. He was automatically following his rescuer down the fire-escape—hooking elbows around the rungs while his hands were still too numb for a firm grip—within two minutes after the other had entered the room. A minute's rest on the bottom grating, then he was able to cross the sills to the front steps. Another two minutes, and His Lordship's car was crawling through the fog.

"Gad, old chap! Your voice is a bit familiar, but blessed if I recognize you!" Leigh exclaimed doubtfully. "Saved my bloomin' life, y'know—not a doubt of it! Never tried cyanide on myself, but I have on rats—one drop did the business. One squeak—a convulsion—all through. Dev'-



The Muscovite brought the weapon down in a terrific blow upon something which the sofa didn't quite conceal.

lish quick stuff! . . . . I say! I missed some of the show—havin' to lie on that blasted table pretendin' to be unconscious, an' grippin' my jaws together until they got the damned screwdriver! How did you happen to shoot Tompkins and Smith?"

"I fired but one shot—the one with a silencer. Here's the gun—count the shells still in the magazine—we might need your evidence on that point, sometime. I smashed Sienkovitch's hand just in the nick of time—couldn't see either Tompkins or Smith through the door of that little room. But I did see Pralov sneak along the wall and throw that light-switch. The two shots came from exactly where he was standing—probably within two feet of his victims. Sienkovitch told McMurtrie in the little room, just after they blackjacked you, that those two M.P.'s were traitors who already had betrayed some of his crowd. He wanted to kill 'em at once, but McMurtrie wouldn't have it—said he was unquestionably mistaken about them. He and Pralov, however, thought they knew better—were positive they were the cause of your being in that room. I'm wondering if possibly they weren't right, after all? Anyhow—beastly mess all round. . . . . Were you conscious when they laid you on that table?"

"Just beginning to be."

"Enough so to be sure that nobody came in from that little room either before or after the lights went out?"

"Oh, aye! . . . . Positive! My hearing is unusually acute, and I was under enough of a strain to make it more so."

"Then that would settle it! Any expert in gunshot-wounds will know that those two men were shot at not more than two-and-a-half feet distance—and from the side nearest that switch!"

"I say! . . . . How did you happen to come bargin' in?"

"Saw McMurtrie, Woodley and Marshall getting out of a car at the curb. It looked like a radical conference of some sort, so I told my chauffeur to park a few doors below and see if anyone else happened along. Smith and Tompkins got out of another car an' went in. Then along comes Captain Leigh in a taxi—gets out farther down—climbs fire-escape to windows on third floor which had just been lighted. Looked as if the odds were a bit heavy—in case of accidents. So I changed my topper for a cap an' trailed along up to join the party. Deuced glad I did, old chap—the F. O. can't afford to lose you in any dirty little mess like this!"

"Er—would you mind loosenin' up a bit—before we part?"

"Best not, old chap. I'm in a position where one isn't supposed to risk his reputation in any affair of this sort. I'll see that evidence gets to you if you need it. Best give Sir Austen the whole story as you know it—he can do his own guessing as to your 'mysterious unknown,' an' he'll have sense

enough to keep it to himself. Scotland Yard will be diggin' rather deep into this, you know—news-sheets will force 'em to do that. This fog is dev'lish lucky for both you an' me. I was on my way to look up a friend in St. John's Wood—it was just idle curiosity in seeing what those Left Wingers were up to that made me stop an' watch that front door."

When Leigh was set down at Whitehall, he instinctively stood on the sidewalk for a moment to look at the number of the car as it rolled away—but in the circumstances he was half ashamed of the impulse, and it gained him nothing at that, for Sabub Ali had substituted an emergency-plate while waiting for them to come out of the building. The only clear glimpse Leigh had had of his rescuer's face was in the room at McMurtrie's flat, and then the man's cap had been pulled so low, and the collar of his topcoat turned up so high, that Leigh saw only from eyes to chin, while the imperceptible marks from the grease-pencil had changed the expression entirely. With those little lines removed, it would be impossible to identify the man. The Captain realized—with considerable regret on grounds of gratitude—that future recognition was probably impossible.

MEANWHILE, at McMurtrie's apartment in St. John's Wood, the three men and the valet were now returning to the living-room after having agreed upon their story, in Wilhelmina Mennin's flat at the rear of the third floor. The two Russians had quietly slipped out and disappeared without being seen by anybody.

The story the three had decided upon included, of course, their discovery of an unknown man who might have been a burglar or a political agent, in the room opening upon the fire-escape—their knocking him senseless and fetching him into the living-room for examination. Then the sudden switching off of the lights—two shots through the doorway from the smaller room—and their discovery that Smith and Tompkins had been killed, when they turned the lights on again. It was a perfectly good story—plausible enough, since it would appear absurd that either McMurtrie or his other two guests would deliberately shoot his two fellow-members in the House who were supposed to be actively in sympathy with his political convictions.

But the entire absence of a dead burglar or spy on the living-room table knocked the props out from under that story completely—it couldn't be used at all. They stared, astounded, at the empty table. Stepping nervously over the remains of Smith and around the chair holding Tompkins' body, they examined every corner of the apartment. There were scratches from shoes on the window-sill, the fire-escape grating and ladder—but nothing in the hall or stairs to indicate that a wounded, half-conscious man had left by that way.

Marshall's brain seemed to be going around in a maze of fragmentary occurrences which he couldn't piece together.

"I say now, McMurtrie!" he expostulated. "This is a very deuce of a situation, d'ye see! If we tell the police we captured a burglar or a demmed political spy, they're quite sure to ask, 'Where is he?' An' that, d'ye see, we simply can't answer! Beggar couldn't have gotten a drop of that cyanide, after all! Fact is—well—I'm damned glad he didn't, even though it leaves us in a beastly hole! Nobody but a bloody Russian would have tried a rotten game like that on an unconscious man! But the beggar'll soon be tellin' all he knows to the police—or somebody who'll talk an' give it to the press-johnnies. Then we're *all* up a tree! There are poor Smith an' Tompkins—done-in by somebody! Without that beggar on the table, we've no proof that the somebody wasn't us! Damme!"

McMurtrie was by far the most intelligent of the lot, and he had been doing some rapid thinking.

"There's one thing we can do! If we pull it off successfully, it lets us out of the whole mess entirely. If we overlook some little thing — leave one shred of evidence which can be traced back to us—it will turn on a most incriminating light—weigh so heavily against us that we might easily hang for murder."

"The devil! We'll surely not try anything of that sort, then!"

"I'm not so sure we wont—because it looks as if it might be about the only thing we *can* do. This fog outside is nine points in our favor. Suppose we prop Tompkins up with one arm over my shoulder and the other over Woodley's—walk downstairs with him, his feet dragging as if he were completely 'sunk'—loaded to the guards. I can telephone the garage to send around my car—which they know I drive myself if I have sent my chauffeur home for the night. We put poor Tompkins in the car an' Woodley stays there with him until we

fetch Smith down—after getting some gauze bandages from Mina, tying his head up with them and jamming his hat down over it. Going clear across the city and down the river is too much of a risk—we might be stopped and investigated at a dozen different places. We'll strike the nearest bank of the river where there is a warehouse or storage-yard, giving us a chance to dump them in. The tide is just about turning, now—before morning, tide and current should take them quite a distance.

"If we pull it off and get back without being seen, that lets us out completely. No matter what that spy says—or to whom—we simply look astonished and give him the lie—flatly. Let him prove what he says—if he can! We—all of us, including Mina and Hobbs—simply know nothing at all of any other persons coming into this flat tonight or being killed here. Ridiculous story! What evidence is there of anything like that? Nonsense! Sienkovitch and Pralov most certainly wont admit that they were here tonight—or know anything of what might have occurred. It's either getting those bodies into the river and telling that story, or else calling the police—having them investigating the whole place—probably holding us for trial on a complicity charge if nothing worse—news-sheets full of it—our political careers absolutely ruined! Take your choice!"

THE other two hesitated—looked at the bodies—tried to visualize what would happen after the police were in charge—then glanced at the valet Hobbs, who had been listening to the discussion.

"Hobbs—what's your story of this affair? Suppose you tell us just what you saw—heard—thought about it. Just as you would tell it to the police if you had to."

"Well, sir—it's this w'y. I lets in them two Rooshuns—goes back to the kitchen an' begins gettin' together a bit o' supper for the gentlemen to h'eat, presently. Then I 'ears the Marster a-goin' h'into the small room with one o' them Rooshuns—an' a-comin' back luggin' h'another chap wot one o' them 'as 'it an' knocked barmy—an' a-plicin' 'im on the table, like. The tall Rooshun, 'e's f'r doin' 'im in with stuff 'e 'as in a bottle. Then somethin' whacks 'is 'and an' goes through it—smashin' the little bottle against the wall. Then the lights goes h'out—an' I 'ears two shots. The lights goes on again. I'm a-lookin' through the door from the kitchen-passage. Mr. Smith, 'e's a-lyin' h'on the rug. Mr. Tompkins' scrooged down h'in 'is chair—done-in! The little Rooshun's standin' by the wall near the switch—"

"Where did those two shots come from, Hobbs? . . . . Through the door from the little room?"

"No, sir. I was lookin' strite h'along the wall, like—an' they come from about where that little Rooshun was a-standin'."

"My God! Sienkovitch told me that Smith and Tompkins were double-crossers—said they'd informed against his lot both in Paris and here. He was for killing them before they left the flat—but I told him he was mistaken—crazy! So Pralov evidently did the job himself, just to settle the matter! If we let this get out, it will hang both of them and implicate us sufficiently for a prison term! No, we simply can't have Scotland Yard putting Hobbs over the grill—before they got through, he'd be giving them just what he's given us! I say, Hobbs! . . . . If we get these bodies out of here, can you forget that either they or the Russians were here at all, this evening—and keep forgetting it?"

"Aye, sir—very good, sir. The Rooshuns an' these pore gentlemen didn't 'appen to come h'in this h'evening at h'all!"

"And—er—while we're gone, Hobbs—you're to scrub away every trace of blood in the room. Examine every corner of this and the smaller room—remove every trace you find of what happened here!"

AT the Trevor mansion in Park Lane, the affair was being discussed in all its details by Trevor, Countess Nan, Earl Lammerford and Baron Abdool, at breakfast. Considerably to their surprise, there was no mention of it in the morning news-sheets and their supposition was that Scotland Yard had withheld all information concerning it in order to lull the murderers into a belief that none of the real facts were known. McMurtrie, of course, as an M. P. was a man of considerable influence. whom the police naturally would wish to avoid compromising until they had more data. Marshall and Woodley also were politicals with an excellent reputation. But it seemed odd that the bodies should have been removed even to an undertaking establishment without the press getting wind of it and publishing something.

As they idled over their cups of coffee, Trevor's code- and radio-expert came up from the subterranean telegraph-room,

sixty feet below the gardens, with a communication from Inspector Graham of Scotland Yard—a friend for many years of Earl Trevor, who frequently sent on to him evidence which led to important arrests, and always received from him advance tips on any startling crime committed. The message stated that the Thames police had just taken from the river, below the Isle of Dogs, the bodies of Tompkins and Smith, Members of Parliament, with gunshot-wounds showing that they had been killed before being dumped into the water —apparently some fifteen hours before.

The telegrapher went back to his instruments after laying the message by His Lordship's plate. As Trevor read the message to them, the group around the table looked rather blankly at each other. This was something that none of them had looked for, considering McMurtrie's reputation for respectability; they hadn't credited him with even the necessary nerve, in fact.

"Well, if he pulled it off without being seen by anybody in that fog, last night—and I'll wager that he did—it puts the burden of proof squarely up to the police! Leigh and I are the only living men who might tip them a hint to search McMurtrie's flat—it's pounds to pence that they've removed every trace they could find, but that's by no means sayin' Graham wouldn't turn up something! In fact, I'd back myself to find evidence in that room. Still—if they've any sort of a reasonable explanation for whatever might be found, it's again up to the police to prove the contr'ry.

"Mind you—I'm not blaming McMurtrie and his friends for making such a play, though it's likely enough to put a noose around their necks in the long run. Not one of them—nor that woman—is responsible for those murders, unless you might say that having those two bolshevists in one's flat constitutes responsibility—considering that the lot of them were plotting what amounts to rank treason against the British Government. But they didn't have any hand in committing the murders, an' I heard McMurtrie refusing even to consider such a thing. So you can't blame 'em for trying to get out of the beastly mess in any way that looked safe. Except for Leigh or me, they *are* safe. Point is—shall we let 'em get away with it?"

"WOULD you go on the witness-stand yourself, George?" asked Countess Nan doubtfully.

"No—because there are other ways of producing the evidence. A Cabinet Minister isn't supposed to enter another man's flat with a pistol, at night—disguised beyond recognition. Look a bit fishy, you know—my reasons for stoppin' the car in that street and watching who went into McMurtrie's flat—then following an F. O. man up the fire-escape! Of course, if I published the discussion of what they were proposing to do, it would somewhat better my position—but I'd still have to prove why I suspected any of them in the first place. No, it's not the Cabinet's job—that sort of thing.

"On the other hand, it most certainly *is* Leigh's job—he went there to obtain just that information. Only hope they don't dig out of him on the stand all that he heard! But it's going to make the Captain prove that he had no hand in the murders—a dev'lish diffic'lt job, all points considered. He'll tell his version of the story. Then they'll either deny flatly that he ever was in the flat at all, or else state that he fired the shots from the little room before they trapped and overpowered him. *H-m-m*—no—they can't do that now! Had they sent for the police at once, they could. But now they can't admit that the shooting took place in that flat at all, without incriminating themselves a lot more than Captain Leigh. He may consider it best to let the matter lie and shadow those Muscovites until he catches them cold in some other way—"

"If they're not already out of the country," interrupted Lammerford. "Sienkovitch wont risk showing that hand in London. He's already done or started what he was sent here to do. Some one else can carry on the work—and they'll transfer him to another country where his hand wont look suspicious."

"I doubt his leaving the country—he has all the ramifications of the soviet campaign for an economic revolution here, right in his fingers—and he has more cold-blooded intelligence in organization than any other man they've sent here. You know—if Sienkovitch and Pralov were taken right up to heaven, now, in a fiery chariot, the United Kingdom would be noticeably further from a labor revolution than it is! Making them pay the penalty for their crimes is the simplest way to block all of their plans."

"*If* you can pin those crimes on to them. That may take some doing, I fancy!"

AN hour later, the Earl of Dyvnaint was ushered into the private office of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs—and laid upon his desk a letter which he said had been delivered in Park Lane that morning by a special messenger.

It was signed merely with three initials—"D. F. L."—and described every detail of the affair in McMurtrie's flat during the previous evening. The writer stated that

Sienkovitch was moving the tube toward the man's parted teeth when something struck his hand with a sharp impact.

he had just heard of the bodies being found in the lower Thames, and wished Scotland Yard to search the place while there still might be a few bits of evidence left, as McMurtrie, supposing it impossible that attention would be directed to him for some time, undoubtedly would take his time about going over the rooms in a more careful manner. The purported author of the letter explained that he was a man occupying a prominent position, who obviously preferred not to give evidence in person—but, knowing the Earl's thoroughness in everything he undertook, hoped he would induce the Foreign Secretary to use every effort in the matter.

Sir Austen read the letter a second time.

"You have some idea who wrote this, Trevor?"

"Well—I have, and I have not. Do the initials suggest anything to you?"

"'*D. F. L.*'? Why, I don't— Surely you're not thinking of those old myths, the Diplomatic Free Lances?"

"Are you quite sure they were myths? As a matter of fact, I've reason to believe the writer of this letter was, or is, one of them. This man may be any one of four I have in mind—your guess would be as good as mine concerning which it is, so we'd best not bother too much about his identity. Of one thing I'm positive—whatever he states as fact, you may rely upon as fact. You've read what he says as to Captain Leigh's part in the affair. Has Leigh reported to you? Does it tally with this?"

"Absolutely! He thought the voice of his unknown rescuer sounded vaguely familiar, but though Leigh saw his face in the living-room, he can't identify the man at all—nor did he even get a glimpse at his car-number, while the chauffeur's face was muffled up in the collar of a mackintosh—couldn't make him out at all in the fog."

"You believe Leigh's story, don't you?"

"I did at first. But with those bodies being found away down the river, I don't know what to think! It's Leigh's bare word against McMurtrie's—and that of the others. Can't see how the deuce we could prove a thing against them!"

"If my old friend Inspector Graham investigates that place at once, he will prove it—somehow! Will you send for him, to come around here—now?"

"Means implicating Leigh, you know! Is the game worth it?"

"Were Tompkins and Smith really giving you information—or not?"

"Well—the poor chaps are dead, now—nothing can hurt them any more. May as well admit that they did give us a hint now and then—information we'd have had difficulty in getting, too. But this is strictly confidential, you know."

"Of course. It furnishes the motive for the murders, however—doesn't it? Are you going to let those blasted Muscovites get away with murder, and keep right on plotting against the Governm'nt?"

"No, we can't permit *that,* no matter what it may cost us!"

He picked up his desk-telephone and asked to have New Scotland Yard put on. "You'll wait here to go over the matter with me and Graham, wont you?" he requested Trevor.

"That's my intention—of course," assented His Lordship.

IN fifteen minutes, the Inspector was fetched into the office—and Captain Leigh had been called in to give his version of the affair. The letter delivered to His Lordship after breakfast was shown him. While he was taking it all in, the Inspector said never a word. He accepted one of His Excellency's cigars, lighted it—then quietly asked of Leigh:

"Got anything at all to back up your story, Captain?"

"*H-m-m*—wait a minute! Sir Austen, will you kindly ask one of your stenographers to fetch in the little screwdriver from the drawer of her typewriter cabinet?" When the girl had brought it, and gone, he continued: "Now, Inspector, I will clench my teeth. You pull up my lip on the left side and push that screwdriver blade between them. You'll see that it exactly fits the space where they broke off the tops of two of my teeth. It hurt like the very deuce—but one drop of cyanide would have fixed me so that nothing ever would have hurt again!"

Graham tried it—watched with intense interest by the other two; then he nodded.

"I doubt if you'd break those teeth here at the F. O., Captain—just to fake a report. If we could find Sienkovitch, the condition of his hand would also corroborate what you say, but we'll have no such luck. However—his keeping out of sight today is fairly good evidence in itself. He'd not do that without reason, because he and Pralov were stayin' quite openly at the Carlton. It will take but a half-hour to get a search-warrant for McMurtrie's flat. I noticed His Lordship's car outside. We'll go in that—less conspicuous. If you three gentlemen will accompany me, I'll have two of our men pick up McMurtrie and fetch him along."

HOBBS opened the door of McMurtrie's flat. He said his master was not at home, and painters were due at any moment to wax the floors—but at sight of the warrant, he offered no further objections.

Leigh casually asked what had become of the Persian rug which had been spread upon the floor at the foot of the table. The valet explained that one of the radio-battery jars had been upset, burning clear through it with acid and eating into the oak floor as well.

Without the exact information possessed by the investigators, this explanation would have been entirely plausible.

In the smaller room, the Inspector found heel-marks upon the cream-colored baseboard, behind the end of the sofa—where Leigh had knelt in trying to hide. Upon the grating of the fire-escape and the iron rungs of the ladders, the weathered accumulations of dust had been scraped bare in places until there was an occasional gleam of bright metal and recent rust—unquestionably, one or two men had climbed those ladders within twenty-four hours. In the living-room, a bunch of grasses in a vase stood upon a phonograph-cabinet against the wall at the rear of the table. When the Inspector—noticing that this vase was directly opposite the door from the smaller room—looked behind the grasses, he dug out of the plaster, with his jack-knife, a .38-caliber slug from an automatic pistol—with dried blood adhering to it. Throwing a light from a pocket-torch upon the wooden floor between the table and the kitchen-passage, he made out several spots on the boards.

"These would have come from Sienkovitch's hand as he went back into the kitchen to rinse it with warm water. Must have been jolly painful, I fancy! . . . . There's the entrance-bell—push your button, Hobbs! It's prob'ly McMurtrie and my two men."

When the M. P. came in with the deputy inspectors (in mufti) he was noticeably annoyed—but civil enough.

"Good morning, Inspector! You've an official warrant for what you are doing, of course?"

"Oh—aye. No diffic'lty in getting that—with the evidence we have."

"Evidence? Of what? I don't understand!"

"Forgotten all about the two murders here last night, have you, McMurtrie? An' the attempted murder of Captain Leigh—Foreign Office—which you were watching without doing anything to stop it? Just paralyzed, I suppose? Well, you gentlemen in the House have a great deal on your minds—enough to make you forget a lot of unimportant matters, I fancy. Man, man! *Why* were you so foolish? If it were not for Captain Leigh an' the man who rescued him by that wonderful shot, you'd have gone to the noose an' pit in the little toolhouse for last night's work! They've exonerated you—but you took a frightful chance! Now—will you give me your side of the story—or will you not?"

"If Captain Leigh is the man who broke into my apartment last night and nearly lost his life while I was too stunned with horror at what I saw to make a motion, you must have the whole story, Inspector! Don't overlook the fact, however, that had I shot and killed him myself I was quite within my rights as a householder. Whoever it was who rescued him certainly shot my two friends a moment afterward—through that doorway!"

"Wait a moment, if you please. Did you hear the shot which smashed the Russian's hand?"

"I was in no condition to hear anything—I was paralyzed with horror! No, I heard no shot! Just saw the blood spurt from his hand and the little glass phial go smash against the wall!"

"Aye—that's prob'ly the truth, man. Now—the next two shots came in the dark, did they not? Did you hear them?"

"My word! They nearly split my ears!"

"Aye—they would—they were fired toward you. That first shot was from an automatic with a silencer. Obviously, the same man wouldn't remove the silencer to fire the other two shots. Eh? Captain, will you place His Lordship in that chair in exactly the position Tompkins was hunched up after he died? An' will you then lie down on the floor in exactly the position that Smith was? Thank you! Pralov would have been standing about there, against the wall—when the lights went on again. Sienkovitch was wild with pain—paying no attention to what was happening, but staggered back into the kitchen to rinse his hand. Right? Very good! Tompkins was shot more in front than at the side—through the heart. Smith was standing by the table just beyond—facing toward the little room? That's what you saw with your eyelids not quite closed—eh, Captain? Very good! Sir Austen—will you stand where Pralov was? You see? Obviously you could not have shot those two men where they were shot—from that position. Eh? Er—Hobbs! . . . . Will you fetch the pistol you were cleaning in the kitchen last evening when it accidentally went off? It was an automatic—you were so startled that you forgot to release the pressure of your finger on the trigger until two shots had been fired!"

THE man's mouth dropped open in amazement. He mechanically obeyed—one of the deputy inspectors at his heels—and handed Graham a big German Lüger.

"*H-m-m*—had enough of trying to clean it, didn't you? Didn't care about fooling with the thing any more—chucked it in a drawer! Here's the magazine—two shells missing—the rest still in it. Put the darbies on him, Jeeves! That was a pretty serious 'accident,' Hobbs! We'll have to let the Lord Justice decide upon it. You see, those shots didn't go off in the kitchen—they were fired point-blank within two feet, after Pralov switched off the lights and you ran in, with felt slippers on, through the passage. You were back, out of sight, before McMurtrie turned them on again."

A sudden exclamation came from Leigh, who had been studying Hobbs' face.

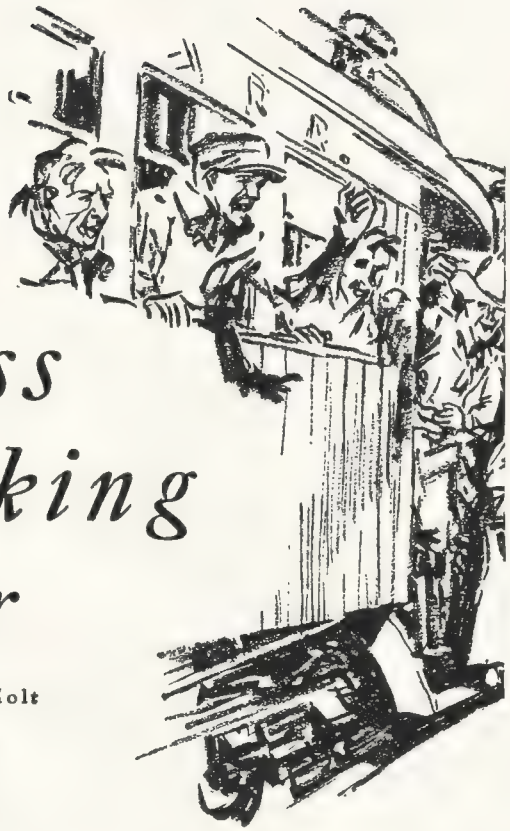
"I didn't recognize this man last night—but I do now! Saw him last in Moscow! What they call a 'probationer'—under sentence of death by the Soviet, but sent out to work under their agents in some other country—sworn to obey their orders at whatever personal risk. Sienkovitch planted him here, of course, for anything which might come up, and he was undoubtedly obeying orders."

Hobbs, however, was duly tried and hanged.

Inspector Graham thought the other two Russians had escaped him—but His Lordship suggested loaning Captain Leigh a posse to comb a certain locality on Dartmoor—and to camp there until something happened.

By
JAY LUCAS

A stirring story of the West that was wild, by the author of "Vanishing Herds" and "The End of the Bar-Box-D."



The Boss of the Rocking Rafter

Illustrated by William Molt

"DANG it, I wish that train would show up! I'm so oneasy, wonderin' what the new boss will look like, that I feel like I'm a-settin' on a brandin' fire."

Little Jim Dignan, foreman of the Rocking Rafter, nervously pushed his oversized hat to an awkward angle, and tugged at his straggling wisp of gray mustache. He shifted uneasily on legs the knees of which were scarcely within hailing distance of each other, and clicked his boot-heels together to make his spurs tinkle. Tiny, dainty little boots they were, for old Jim was a true cowboy, and would rather wear boots two sizes too small than "look like a nester."

"I think I hear it coming round the mountain now, Dad."

The girl was almost as tall as her father, although she was no more than medium height. There could be no mistaking the relationship, for both had the same mild, innocent blue eyes—eyes that had a trick of suddenly snapping into a flinty sternness without reason, and then relaxing to a twinkle equally without reason.

"Yeah—here it comes now, Jane. If he—"

Suddenly little Jim Dignan pursed his lips, his eyes traveling over the girl's shoulder. In a lower voice, he continued:

"Here comes that dog-gone Horseshoe Bar range-boss! Whoever named him Bulldog Jones must have seen a bulldog sometime—he's got jest the same neck an' chin."

The man spoken of came ponderously forward. He must have weighed two hundred and twenty pounds, and it was easily seen that he had not only fat but a good deal of solid, bulky muscle on his great torso. He now seemed to have been drinking; there was an unpleasant glitter in his eyes. In a thick, guttural drawl he spoke to the little man before him:

"Howdy, Jim. How's things?"

"Howdy."

Little Jim's answer was curt.

"Reckon yo're waitin' here for the new boss o' the Rocking Rafter to git in. Hell, aint it, that you'll have a dude to boss you, Jim—from Chicago, I hear."

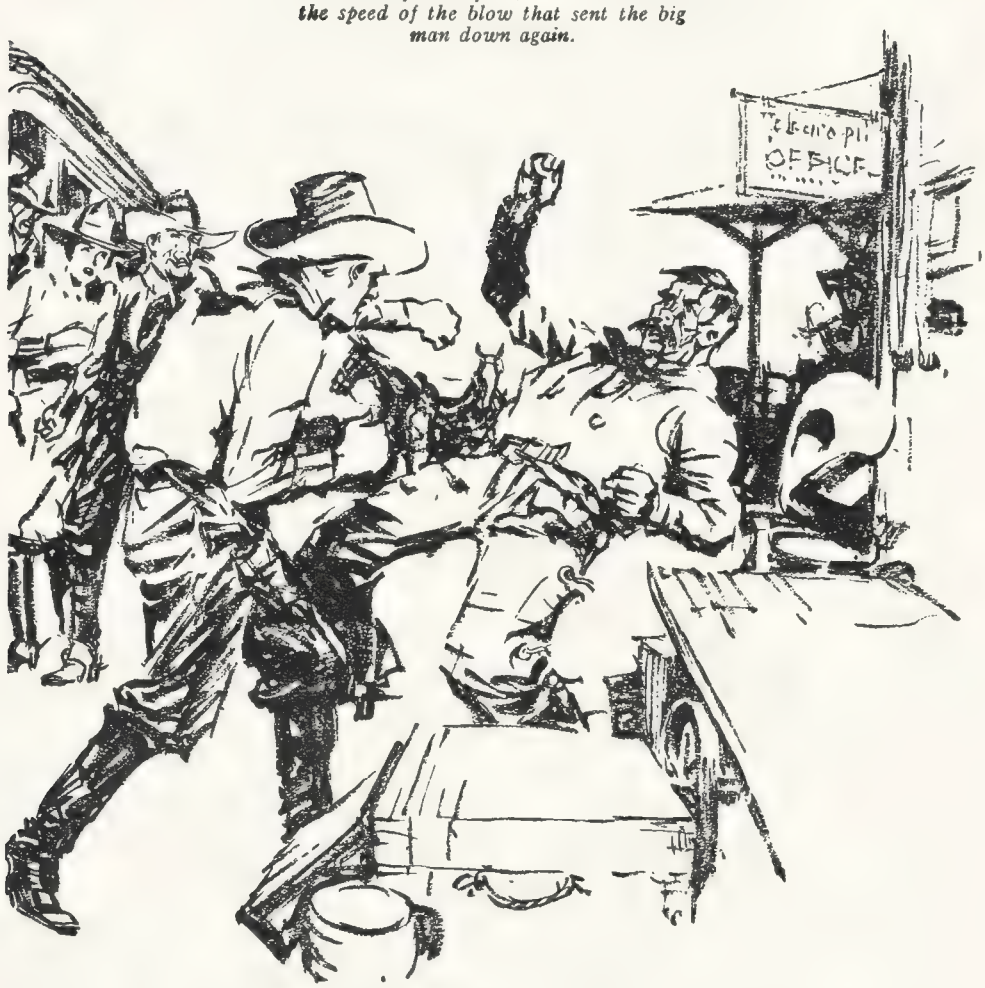
"Thanks for yore sympathy," murmured Jim Dignan ironically, "but I'm quittin' as soon as I get him out to the ranch."

"Nephew of old Billy Hadley, I hear?"

"Yeah."

"Too bad old Billy had to go shoot himself that way! I never thought he was that kind o' quitter—jest crawl under a tree out on the range an' blow his head off'm himself!"

"Lesson Two—lettin' a feller butt his head against your left!" That, indeed, was almost what happened—it was more the force of his own rush than the speed of the blow that sent the big man down again.



There was a sneer in Bulldog Jones' voice. Jane Dignan turned to him suddenly with compressed lips, and hard lines around her eyes. Then she spoke, the words snapping out in contrast to her usual drawl:

"See here, Bulldog! We need no sympathy from you or anyone else belonging to the Horseshoe Bar. Understand?"

"Shore do, lady," chuckled Bulldog, with a leer.

"And furthermore,"—her face was getting white with anger,—"I want you to know that old Billy Hadley did *not* kill himself—I don't care what the coroner said."

"Lady," leered Bulldog mockingly, "I believe you—shore I do!"

She stood a moment, while the last trace of color fled from her face; she had completely lost her temper.

"Bulldog Jones," her voice was biting, "I'm going to tell you what *I* believe: I believe your Horseshoe Bar outfit knows something or other about old Billy's killing. Get that! An' I believe, too, that your Horseshoe Bar outfit is about the most low-down gang in the whole of Arizona, an' yo're the most low-down o' the whole outfit. Get *that!*"

As her anger had increased, she had dropped more and more into the vernacular of the range on which she had been born and reared.

"Wait a minute, Jane!"

Her father pushed her aside.

"Jane, you said a little too much for good manners for a gal—but at that you didn't say anything aint so. —I stand back of what she said, Bulldog."

"Then—then, you damned little weasel, I'm jest a-goin' to take you across my knee and spank you; yo're too little to fight like a man! An' furthermore, I'm a-goin to spank you while the train is pullin' in, so that the new boss o' the Rockin' Rafter can see his foreman when he looks out the window. If he don't like it, I'll give him the same."

The huge Jones had little Jim by the arms and was pulling him toward an empty crate that would serve as a seat. Age and small size rendered the Rocking Rafter foreman almost helpless despite his struggles.

"Jones—Jones—if you do it, I'll kill you, even if I hang for it!"

"Stop it! Let Dad loose, you beast! Stop it!"

Jones released one hand to push Jane away, and the little man caught him a blow in the mouth that drew blood.

"Say, you little rat!" he roared. "I'll break yore head!"

HE drew back his fist to strike, but a muscular hand seized his wrist.

"*Wait* a minute, big fellah! Aint you gettin' too excited? This man is less'n half yore size, an' about twice yore age."

"Say, you mind yore own business!"

Bulldog glared at the interferer—a cowboy well over six feet, with narrow hips and extremely wide shoulders.

"I kinda reckon this *is* my business—or anyone's. Yo're bullyin' an old man an' pushin' a girl around. Why don't you fight some one yore size—"

Bulldog Jones released old Jim, and stood glaring at the other a moment. He could see that he had an advantage of weight of perhaps forty or fifty pounds.

"You, fer instance!" he spat.

"An' why not?" asked the cowboy cheerfully.

"All right—here's a lesson in mindin' yore own business!"

ALONG the full length of the train, heads shot from windows as the great bulky man approached the more slender one menacingly, crouched in a manner that showed he knew something, at least, of the art of boxing. The stranger was standing with his hands by his sides, not attempting to guard

"Here's Boxin' Lesson Number One!"

Bulldog aimed a terrible swing at the other's jaw, a swing with murderous force behind it. But something went wrong—the Horseshoe Bar man never knew just what. He knew only that he was rolling over in the dust, and that blood was gushing from his mouth far more rapidly than it had after the old man's feeble blow.

"Well, keep on with the boxin' lesson, big fellah—yo're doin' fine!"

For a moment Bulldog crouched on one knee and the knuckles of one hand, glaring like some ferocious beast, while the blood trickled from his lip down his chin. Then he sprang again. One sometimes sees a very large, bulky man who is as active on his feet as a cat. Bulldog Jones was one of those. It was with the quick dash of a wounded and cornered grizzly that he charged.

"Lesson Two—lettin' a feller butt his head against yore left!"

That, indeed, was almost what had happened! It was more the force of his own rush than the speed of the blow that had sent the big man down again. He was up almost instantly, and again coming back. A man with a battered ear and crooked nose was leaning far out a coach window, bellowing advice to the young cowboy:

"Hold your left up, guy! Aint you never boxed before? Hold that left up or he'll get you!"

But the young man did not hear or heed. He clipped his adversary in the left eye, sending him staggering back drunkenly. Again Bulldog rushed in. He felt that if he could strike the other just one good blow, the battle would be over. He caught a punch in the nose that started a new stream of blood.

Then he saw his opening! A terrible right, "starting from the ground," caught the younger man in the jaw, sending him reeling back against the station-house. Bulldog bore madly in to end him before he could recover.

"Clinch, kid, *clinch!*" yelled the old boxer on the train, leaning so far out that he almost toppled to the platform.

But the young man did not know the meaning of the word, so little did he know of scientific boxing. He managed to escape the other's rush to a great extent, and backed hastily down the platform, toward the window where the boxer was, shaking his head dazedly, in an effort to throw off the effects of the blow he had received.

"Stand an' fight!" roared Bulldog, thrusting forward his ugly face aggressively as might the animal after which he was nicknamed.

It was there he made his mistake—in thrusting forward his chin so openly! It was probably mostly luck, but the young cowboy's fist clipped straight into that chin, and the big man slumped to the ground as though he had been shot through the head.

"Kayo!" yelled the man in the window, gleefully. "Gawd, kid, you got a punch!"

BUT the "kid" did not heed. He stood quietly until Bulldog Jones had come partly to his senses and shambled from the station. Then the engineer remembered that he was four minutes late, and jerked back from the cab window to send the train slipping noisily from the station.

"Shore thanks, young feller!"

Old Jim Dignan shook the stranger's hand feelingly.

"Shucks, it was nothin'!"

"The heck it wasn't! Jest wait a minnit, will you? I was expectin' a feller in on the train, an' I want to see if he's in the station."

"No one got off, Dad, but two Indians an' old Dick Spearman," Jane volunteered.

"Oh!" There was relief in old Jim's tone at the postponement of the evil. "He'll likely come in on the six o'clock."

He turned to the other man again.

"Yo're a stranger around here? I know every cowboy in this part of the State, I think."

"I come from over near the New Mexico line—in what they call the Panther Hills country."

"The Panther Hills country! No wonder you could lick Bulldog Jones! Say, they raise some tough nuts over in the Panther Hills!"

The young man looked annoyed.

"Heck, that's only talk! The Panther Hills aint any tougher than lots o' other places," he defended.

"Shore—shore!" hastened Jim. "What I mean is, they aint jest what you'd call a skeery kind o' cowboy that comes from them parts. You didn't turn pale none that I could notice when Bulldog started swingin' at you."

"And," corroborated Jane, "they grow fine riders there—they must have a mean strain of horses."

The old man drew his "makin's," and offered it to the other.

"Shucks," he growled, "I don't see how they could be any meaner than them danged colts we're tryin' to break this year—I aint been able to find a man yet that could set on 'em."

"Pretty snaky?"

Old Jim noted the interest in the other's tone.

"Say," he shot, "lookin' for a job? Want to break 'em for me?"

"I mi— Why—I'm sorry, but I got a job, I reckon."

"Anyway," went on the old man's voice sadly, "you wouldn't want to work for the outfit now; it's gone to a dude from the East; I was expectin' him in on that train."

"Oh!" murmured the stranger.

"Yep—to a paper-collared dude. I'd spent a good part o' my life helpin' the old man build it up, an' now—well, *you* know what'll happen."

The other nodded:

"Yeah—I've seen many an outfit go that way, an' shore hate to see it, too."

"I'm quittin' as soon as I get things turned over to him. I'll hate to leave the old outfit!"

There was a wistful note in the old man's voice, which was reflected in Jane's tones:

"Me too! I was raised there, on the Rockin' Rafter."

"On the— Did you say— Huh!"

THE sympathy left the young cowboy's face, to be replaced by consternation. For a moment he looked blank, and then he staggered to the nearest empty packing box, to sink on it with a roar.

"Pup - pup - paper - collared dude!" he yelled, holding his sides.

"Well, what's funny about it, young feller?" asked the old man gruffly.

"Why—why— Who was you waitin' here for?"

"For William T. Hadley, if you want to know."

"Pup-pup-*paper-collared dude!*" The young cowboy dashed a high-heeled boot into the side of the box, and roared still louder. "Why, *I'm* Bill Hadley, the new owner o' the Rockin' Rafter!"

"You—"

Old Jim Dignan's mouth flew open.

"Heck, yes, old-timer! They call me Rimmy Bill for short. I was in Chicago with a shipment of steers when I got the telegram about Uncle Billy bein' dead, an' wired that I'd be right out here. I jest got here a train earlier than I expected, an'

come down to the station now because I figgered you'd meet this one for me. Course I didn't know who you was when I saw you arguin' with that big feller. Yo're Jim Dignan, I reckon?"

"Uh—yeah—shore. This is my daughter, Jane, Mr. Hadley."

Old Jim had a hard time getting over his surprise and fluster.

"If you'd leave the Mister off an' call me either Rimmy or Bill, I'll know who yo're talkin' to. Proud to meet you, Miss Dignan."

"An' if you'll leave the Miss off an' call me Jane, I'll know who you mean."

Bill Hadley grinned. "Not quittin' this evenin', are you, Jim?" he asked.

"Jest the minnit I turn the Rockin' Rafter over to a paper-collar dude!" chuckled the old man.

Jane settled herself on the seat of the buckboard, between the men. The bronc's gave a few preliminary shies at a scrap of paper in the dust, then went clattering down the dusty street in a swinging trot.

"There's our friend Bulldog Jones," murmured the old man as they passed a saloon.

Rimmy Bill turned to Jim Dignan.

"Who is he, anyway?" he asked.

"Foreman of old Pat McMahon's outfit next us, the Horseshoe Bar."

Bill's face suddenly became serious.

"Good Lord! Mebbe I shouldn't have been so rough with him. Startin' a scrap with a neighborin' outfit that way is no joke—it'll likely end up in shootin'."

"You didn't start it—it started years ago, about when both outfits started. An' as to killin', I hold, an' so does Jane, that they had somethin' to do with the killin' of old Billy."

"What? I thought it was suicide!"

"That's what it was called; but Billy Hadley wasn't the man to kill himself—he'd kill whoever was worryin' him instead. He was found dead with his gun beside him an' one chamber empty."

There was a very grave look on the young fellow's face as he spoke:

"Lord, but I wish we could prove what you say! It's— Who's this comin' after us?" he broke off.

ALL turned on the seat; it was Jane who first recognized the man coming behind on the bony, starved-looking horse.

"It's old Pat McMahon himself."

Jim grunted with disgust, and urged the horses to a faster gait. He spoke to Bill.

"Did you ever see an Irish miser? You don't often meet one—not once in years. But when you do!"

He broke off, and spat over the side of the buckboard.

"Pat McMahon," mused Rimmy Bill. "Sounds like a fighting name."

"Ugh!" Old Jim spat again. "It aint! He wouldn't have the nerve to sneak up on a rabbit an' shoot it from behind. He hires men like Bulldog to do his dirty work. He's worth all kinds o' money, but he lives in an old tumble-down shack on the Horseshoe Bar that—"

"Jim! Hi, Jim—wait for me!"

Jim Dignan reluctantly drew the horses to a stop, and sat with his foot on the brake, rolling a cigarette slowly. Pat McMahon rode alongside. He was a man slightly under medium height, and of stocky build, with gray hair. There was nothing about him to proclaim either the miser or the coward—indeed, he seemed to be the opposite of both: a jolly, happy-go-lucky Irishman, with just a trace of brogue in his speech. Now there was anger and regret in his tones:

"Shure, Jim, what's this I've been hearin' about that foreman o' mine! The rap! I just want you to know I wouldn't have anything o' that kind happen for worrlds! I'm firin' him, with only a week's notice—though the good Lord only knows where I'll get another foreman."

"Too bad!" murmured Jim shortly.

"It was just the divvle, Jim! The Horseshoe Bar an' the Rockin' Rafter have been more than friends since both old Billy—God rest his sowl!—an' me were byes!"

"Yeah—too bad!" murmured old Jim again, dryly.

JIM was refusing to be even civil, but the other pretended not to notice. He wanted information.

"Shure, Jim, I hear your old outfit has gone to some dude from the East. It's too bad, Jim—'tis meself is sorry of it."

"It hasn't. That was a mistake. This is the new boss o' the Rockin' Rafter—Rimmy Bill Hadley, from the Panther Hills."

All three on the buckboard seat had been watching Pat closely, to see how he would react to this information. It took him by surprise, as they had expected, and for a moment they could see on his face a look of pained amazement, and a trace of something else—was it *fear*? Then he was

spurring his half-starved horse alongside, a fat hand extended heartily.

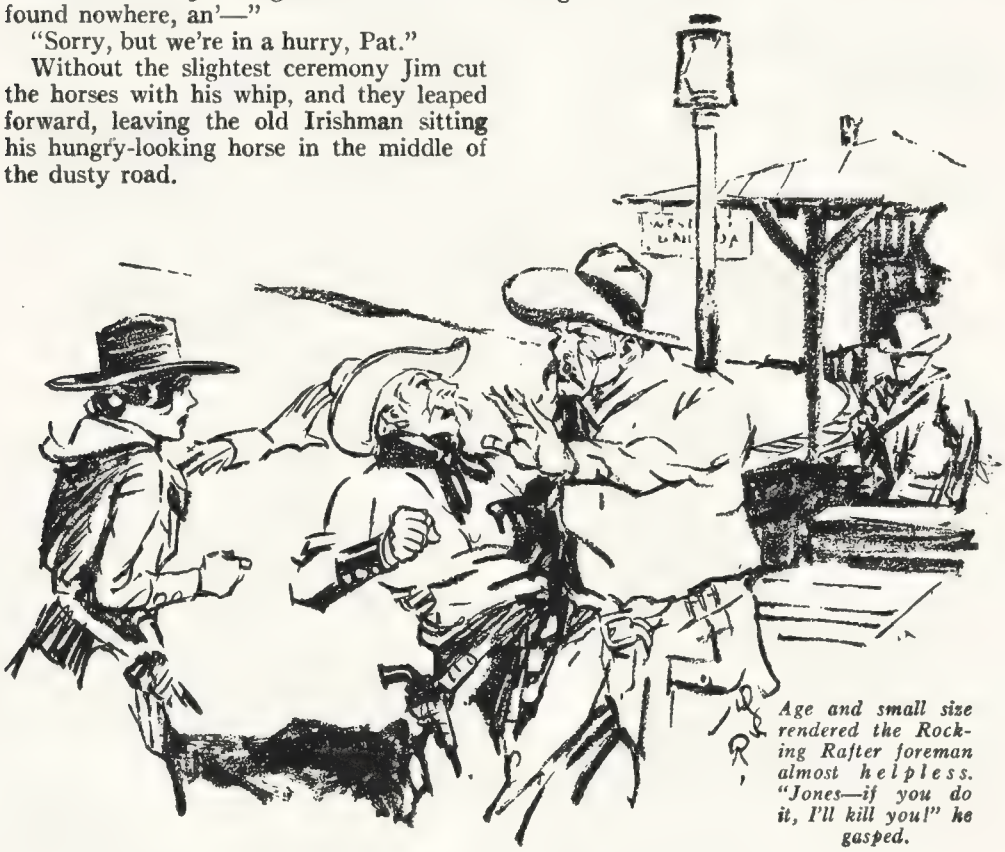
"Shure, I'm glad to meet you, b'y! An' I'm glad the Rockin' Rafter has gone to some one that can run it properly—glad indade I am! Ye'll find that a better foreman than ould Jim Dignan here can't be found nowhere, an'—"

"Sorry, but we're in a hurry, Pat."

Without the slightest ceremony Jim cut the horses with his whip, and they leaped forward, leaving the old Irishman sitting his hungry-looking horse in the middle of the dusty road.

Old Jim drew his cigarette from his mouth and pointed:

"See that long, black-looking cañon 'way over there to the right? That's the boundary of the Horseshoe Bar range. The rest of it, from the ridge here, is yore own range."



Age and small size rendered the Rocking Rafter foreman almost helpless. "Jones—if you do it, I'll kill you!" he gasped.

"Oh, Dad!" gasped Jane, "you shouldn't have done that. What'll Mr. Hadley—I mean Bill here—think of you!"

Rimmy turned to her with a slight grin.

"I think he stood for that mealy-mouth jest a little too long—that's what I think! If our outfits are fightin', let 'em fight it out in the open till it's settled."

THE horses had been slowly climbing a gradual incline. Now they swung around a clump of dense young pines, and Rimmy Bill found himself at the summit of a high ridge, gazing over many miles of lower country, broken by little vivid-colored cañons and punctuated by glistening buttes of red, black or gray.

"Shore pretty country!" gasped Rimmy. "Prettiest I ever saw!"

"For—for how far?"

"Far as you can see. You have a camp beyond that sawtooth range straight ahead, an' more round that mountain you can jest see on the left, that one with the snow on the peak."

Rimmy Bill Hadley seemed to slump in his seat. Then he murmured:

"Why—why, it hits me kinda funny, Jim, all that. I didn't think it was so much. I never drew over fifty a month in my life, an' had to work eighteen hours a day ridin' a rough string for that."

"An'," old Jim spoke quietly, "unless we can put a stop to the thievin' o' Pat McMahon an' his Horseshoe Bar, you'll be workin' for fifty a month again before very long."

Rimmy Bill Hadley looked out over the

range again, a queer light in his eye. He set his lips, and turned slowly to old Jim and his daughter:

"I'm not goin' to lose this range. The Horseshoe Bar had better look out!"

They swung down the steep ridge, up a long draw, and through a rocky cañon. Then up another, lower, ridge they went, and along its back for perhaps three miles, through a thick cedar brake. They turned out to the edge of a little open mesa, and Jim pointed his whip:

"There's yore headquarters ranch—the Rockin' Rafter."

A MILE away it lay, in an open, sandy flat, just behind it an immense bed of unbroken red stone, and behind that the towering cliffs of the Ladrones Mesa.

"Jest the kind of place I'd always been dreamin' of! Stop the horses a minute while we're up here in the open, so's I can get a good look at it."

No sooner had the clatter of the buckboard ceased than they could hear the sound of hoofs approaching in a run from where the road again entered the cedars.

"It's Dick!" gasped Jane, as a man on a sweat-stained horse dashed from the trees. In a moment he was throwing his horse to its haunches beside them.

"Jim," he gasped, "I'm goin' for the doctor. Pete Tully jest rode in, shot through in the back—lucky he managed to hang on to his saddle till he got in; he's in bad shape!"

"Who—who shot him?" asked the amazed Jim, while Rimmy kept silence.

"I didn't wait to find out anything, but jumped on my horse an' started out. The other boys are takin' care o' him. He mumbled somethin' about the Horseshoe Bar, though."

Then, without another word, he cut his horse with his quirt and was gone. The old foreman turned to Rimmy Bill:

"Want to drive? You might be able to make better time than I could."

They had changed seats—and their tight-lipped silence itself meant more than words. The whip stung the horses.

"Tell me if I'm goin' too fast for you."

Rimmy shot one glance at Jane, who clung to the seat with both hands.

"Let 'em go!"

Again the whip cut the horses. They dashed through the cedars, took the curve, and out from the trees they shot, down an open road winding steeply to the foot of the mesa. If the buckboard went off the road, there was an almost sheer drop of two hundred feet to a rocky wash below.

Again Rimmy swung the whip. Occupied even though he was with his driving, he had not failed to note that Jane's face was flushed with excitement, and not pale as might have been expected. There was a wicked curve ahead, with a particularly dangerous drop if anything went wrong. He had been on the point of checking the horses. Now, instead, he let them take it at a dead run, hoping that the line was strong, and would not break when he threw his weight against it. He swung around, two wheels skidding in the loose stones to within six inches of the drop. Then the buckboard bounced from a rounded boulder, and seemingly by a miracle came to an even keel still in the road, and still charging down the mesa-side at full tilt.

THE buckboard swung into the wash, and out the water-washed bank at the other side with a bound that threw all three high in the air. Somehow they clawed their way back to their seats. And now they were racing along the level sandy flat. A glance showed Rimmy that his bed and saddle still remained in their place.

"Look out for that gate—barely room to pass!" gasped Jim.

The gate was open, left open, probably by the man who had gone for the doctor.

"I can make it, I think."

Through the narrow gate, between the high cedar posts with the wire stretcher at the top, shot the buckboard. There was a slight jerk, and a bit of cedar bark dangled from one of the posts, where it had been grazed by an axle.

"Good Lord!" gasped the old man nervously. "That was a narrow squeak!"

"Fine drivin'!" cried Jane excitedly.

The horses were sliding on their heels into the hitching-rack beside the house, the wheels locked from the kick Rimmy Bill had given the brake. A tall, bony cowboy with a long, hooked nose and broken teeth was waiting to seize the animals' heads. With a twisted grin, he turned to Jim:

"Who's the new cow-hand you been hirin', Jim? 'Taint *Ben Hur*, is it?"

"How's Pete?" shot Jim.

"Looks like he aint as bad as we thought he was at first. The bullet grazed his back an' went through his arm without breakin' the bone. Losin' blood is most o' what ails him, I reckon."

JANE was already running to the house and now Jim and Rimmy Bill followed rapidly. They found Pete Tully lying on a rough pine bunk, his face ghastly pale beneath its heavy tan. He was swathed in rough bandages, but with cowboy philosophy he was slowly puffing a hand-made cigarette and giving detailed instructions regarding the disposition and proper care of his horses until he should be able to ride again. The other boys lounged around the room, work forgotten for the present.

"Hello, Jim," called Pete from his bunk.

"Hello, Pete. Hear you been gettin' yoreself shot up some."

"Yeah. Heard a calf bawl in the cedars like it was bein' branded. I knew there wasn't none o' our boys out that way today, so I thought I'd take a look-see. Hadn't got halfway to where he bawled till some one bushwhacked me."

"Aint you got no idea who it was?"

"Heck, no—how could I? He didn't show himself. Of course it jest *couldn't* be anyone from the Horseshoe Bar—we all know that!"

An angry growl passed around the room.

"Jim, didn't you bring that new paper-collared owner out—or did he think you was too rough to 'sociate with?" asked Pete.

Jim crinkled his eyes.

"The new owner is—right here! Boys, meet Rimmy Bill Hadley—from the Panther Hills country."

Before any of the astonished cowboys could speak, he added:

"Rimmy got into a little argument with Bulldog Jones in town, an' jest beat him unconscious right on the platform as the train was pullin' in."

There was a full minute of amazed silence, and then from the other side of the room came a deep voice:

"Well—I'll—be—damned!"

They were crowding around Rimmy Bill, and their "proud to meet you" was far more than mere politeness, as they shook his hand. Anyone could tell from their awed manner that Bulldog Jones had been regarded as invincible.

RIMMY BILL said quietly: "Jim, how would it be if some of us took a little *pasear* over about where Pete was shot? Any horses up?"

"Dang tootin'! I'll saddle one for you—saw yore saddle in the buckboard," one of the boys offered.

A moment later Bill was pulling on his chaps. As might have been expected from his nickname, those chaps were exaggerated "bat-wings" of heavy brown cowhide that stuck back fully a foot behind each leg and flapped tremendously. The rest of his outfit went with the chaps—and with the nickname. His spurs were very long and very straight of shank, with great rowels. His hat was a tremendous affair, with the high crown undented. His boots had eighteen-inch tops inside of which his trousers legs were stuffed—not for him the wide trouser-cuff of the "center"! His six-shooter proved to be an old-fashioned affair with a scarred wooden butt, and he carried it low on his thigh in a very wide belt of folded calf, the bottom of the holster being fastened to his chap-leg with a leather button.

"Well, if that aint a get-up to sour yore stummick!"

This was from Pete Tully, on the bunk. Pete was the only "center" on the outfit, and he felt it his duty to carry on, single-handed, the old, fruitless discussion which long had waxed between the two schools of cowboys.

Rimmy Bill gazed at him sorrowfully.

"Pete, you don't *mean* to tell me yo're a center! Maybe that's why some one shot you!"

"I'll lend you my shotgun chaps," offered Pete sadly.

"They wouldn't go with my saddle—it's sixty pounds, an' nigh as big as yore bunk."

"I believe," murmured Pete, "a paper-collared dude would've been better'n this!"

"I see the horses are all about saddled. Wait till I get back, an' I'll show you the error of yore views," grinned Rimmy, flapping noisily through the door.

Blacky Spate, a small, slender young fellow with dark face and flashing eyes, held a splendid sorrel horse on which was the great rim-fire saddle of Bill Hadley's.

"Fine!" grunted Bill enthusiastically.

"You bet he is," murmured Blacky. "You mightn't think it of so big a critter, but he's the best cuttin' horse on the outfit—an' that's sayin' a heap. Name's Reddy."

"Fine!" exclaimed Rimmy Bill again. But the real reason of his obvious delight was not the horse, but the fact that Blacky Spate had saddled the animal and was now holding him patiently. Rimmy knew Blacky's type—fiery devils, prouder than Lucifer, enemies to be dreaded as a rattlesnake, or friends who will die for one. That

Blacky now held the horse showed that he and the rest of the outfit had unquestioningly accepted Rimmy Bill as their leader.

"All ready? Let's go, boys!"

He was about to swing into the saddle when Blacky Spate spoke again:

"Watch out for Reddy! He aint been rid for a long time, so he's likely to break in two. If he does, he'll be pretty hard to sit."

"Thanks for tellin' me!" murmured Rimmy, astonished at such courtesy.

Old Jim was coming from the house, buckling his chaps.

"Bill," he said, "if you'd lead that Reddy horse up a few steps an' circle him a time or two when you get on, he wont do anything."

Bill grinned.

"Well, if he throws me, it wont be the first time I've been piled—not by a danged sight."

He seized the cheek of the bridle and swung easily into the saddle. He held the horse's head up until he had shaken himself down in the saddle to his satisfaction, and then released it. It was an unpretentious way of mounting, not showy, but the group around recognized it for thoroughly workmanlike.

"Now, let's see what he does!"

He touched the animal very gently with a spur, and reined it to one side. He was leaving it up to it whether to buck or not.

"Not much of a show-off, the new boss!" muttered one of the boys under his breath.

The horse took a step or two, timidly, but as though intending to strike a steady gait. Then it humped its back with a quick twitch, and took another step. And then, without warning, it flung itself upward and sideways in the air, coming down again with its head very nearly where its tail had been. It bounced like a rubber ball, and leaped at a new angle, its head hidden between its fore-legs, the saddle stuck up at a queer angle on its arched back.

"Ride 'em, cowboy!" cried old Jim.

"Watch that big feller ride!" gasped some one.

It was indeed an exhibition of riding worth seeing, for Rimmy Bill swung and swayed in the saddle as easily as though the horse had been loping gently. Back and forth bucked Reddy, trying by queer twists and contortions to unseat his rider.

"Say," gasped old Jim, "that Reddy is doin' the dangedest he ever did!"

"He's *buckin'!*" grunted Blacky.

THE horse had been circling until now he had come, probably by accident rather than design, to the great bed of red sandstone behind the house. Here he made a stand, and tried his best to shake loose the man who clung to his back.

"Stick 'im, Rimmy!" yelled Blacky.

It was advice that few could have followed, for here it was almost as much a matter of pure endurance as of riding skill. The lean, long muscles of the sorrel showed him to be an animal of immense power, and now every ounce of that power was used to hurl himself high in the air. Then down he would come, stiff-legged, his steel shoes cracking against the solid rock until it seemed that his leg bones must break from the impact. The strain upon his rider must have been intense—but still Rimmy Bill swung and swayed in the big saddle.

Once the horse slipped, and then, as though realizing his danger, he left the rock. Back past the house he went, but now he was going in long, twisting leaps that were little more than mere crow-hopping—and Slick Partridge spoke with admiration:

"He's rode!"

JUST beyond the house was a sudden drop in the sandy ground—a lower terrace of the little draw washed by the stream in past ages. Toward this steep little bank bucked the big sorrel, almost ready to settle down to whatever gait his rider wanted. And then, at the very edge of the bank, the spill came. Horse and rider went over in an ugly tangle. For an instant there was a whirl of flying legs, flying stirrup leathers, flying arms—then horse and man had disappeared over the bank.

"Good God!" some one gasped.

All rushed forward, some mounted, more afoot. And then over the edge of the bank appeared a big hat, and an instant later a pair of broad and very dusty shoulders. Rimmy Bill rode back to the others, grinning, and unhurt.

"Which way do we go?" he asked.

"Through the gate an' over the cedar ridge."

Little Jim swung in beside Rimmy Bill, and the others who were not mounted, hastily climbed into their saddles.

"Dang!" grunted Bill. "Seems queer to me to be leadin' my own outfit this way!"

They swung along at a steady clip for half an hour or so, with very little said. Then old Jim spoke: "We must be gettin' pretty near where he was shot."

It was a wicked curve, but he let them take it at a run, two wheels skidding to within six inches of the drop.

They had startled occasional cattle as they rode, and now, even as Jim spoke, a calf darted out of a clump of small cedars and dashed away.

"Fresh brand! Git him!" grunted Bill

He dug the spurs in the sorrel, and himself was upon the fleeing calf in a few bounds. His rope shot through the air, and settled neatly over the calf's neck. Quickly Blacky's pegging-string was around its feet, and the rope was removed.

"Horseshoe Bar!" grunted some one.

"Pretty fresh, too—I can smell the burn on the hair!" added Rimmy.

"Well," asked Jim, "what's to be done about it? It's open range, an' there's calves of all brands mixed up here."

"Let's take a look around an' see if we can find the mother," said Bill. "She can't be far off. This calf is suckin'—anyone can see that, it's so fat an' slick."

"There she is, lyin' down over there—" began Slick Partridge, but suddenly broke off: "No—that's a dead cow I see."

Having examined the brand to make quite sure of its freshness, Rimmy slowly removed the pegging-string and handed it up to Blacky. He watched the calf race away through the cedars, and then swung into his saddle. Absently he rode to the dead cow, the others around him, waiting for him to make the next move.

"Wonder why she went an' died?" murmured Slick. "She looks to be in good shape."

"Probably et some poison weed," ventured some one absently—a dead cow was too common a sight to cause comment.

Rimmy Bill turned curiously to his men.

"Notice," he remarked, "that's she's marked jest like that Horseshoe Bar calf. There's the same white blotch on the jaw—jest a little different in shape; an' she has about the same amount o' white on her tail. Besides, both of 'em are line-backs."

"Well, anyway," some one yawned, "the cow was dead, so I suppose the calf had to be called a maverick or leppie or somethin' that way."

"Jim," Bill said very gravely, "you said they raise tough customers in the Panther Hills. Well, maybe yo're right, Jim. Anyways, I reckon there aint many skunks in this part of Arizona low-down enough to do a dirty trick like this—which is why you didn't get wise to it. It's a common trick where I come from—an' one that leads to lead-p'isonin' of whoever does it, if he's caught."

The boys were staring, puzzled.

RIMMY BILL swung off his horse. He seized one of the cow's legs, and, with a mighty tug, flopped the carcass over.

"Well—I'll be—! *Say!*"

The boys sat staring, wide-eyed, and to their lips came exclamations of surprise and fury. The ground where the cow had been lying was wet and sticky, and so was her side that had been down. The earth

and long hair had hid the bullet-hole—but no one needed to see it.

"That," grunted Rimmy, "is the quickest known method of weanin' calves."

An oath came from old Jim—who seldom swore.

"So *that's* it!" he grunted. "So *that's* why so many cows have been dyin' lately! We was blamin' it on p'ison weeds."

He sat staring at the cow a moment, and then spoke again jerkily:

"Well, Bill, I been lettin' this go on a long time. I see I don't know the game well enough to run the outfit! I'll quit an' get off the outfit right now."

He started to turn his horse, but Rimmy seized his bridle.

"Heck, old-timer, don't get so het up over a little thing like that! You don't know all the cow game, an' neither do I, nor anyone else. If you quit, an' I not knowin' the range, you'll leave me in a bad hole."

Jim Dignan hesitated.

"We-ll, all right—I'll stay till you learn the range. But danged if I see how they could get away with it!"

"Why, I could see right away that the ground had been disturbed more around here than a dyin' cow would be likely to do—that was some one coverin' up blood with the cedar dirt."

"But they couldn't get away with it often!"

"If you'd come here an hour later, it would be likely that a bunch of cattle would have found this carcass—an' what do cows do when they find another dead?"

"Why—say—I see it now! They'd tromp up all the ground around here—jest stand around all evenin' trompin' an' bellerin'."

"The dirty skunks!" grunted Blacky, referring not to the cattle but to the neighboring outfit.

"Well, what'll we do?" some one asked.

Rimmy Bill thought a long time before he answered, slowly:

"Whoever did this made a mistake in not gettin' the calf away from here after the shootin'—maybe it got away from 'em in the excitement. Anyway, that fresh-branded calf is straight evidence that it was a Horseshoe Bar man killed the cow—an' shot Pete Tully, too, o' course."

"We didn't need evidence!" grunted Blacky.

"Well, we have it, anyway. Likely they think Pete is dead, or near it."

Old Jim ventured a remark:

"Bulldog would have got to the ranch long ago. It's near town, an' he was horseback, so he wouldn't have to follow roads like we did in the buckboard."

"Then he— Say, what's that?"

The men whirled, barely in time to see a horse disappear in the cedars at the edge of a little opening on the high ridge above them.

"Some one was ridin' out an' saw us. Ducked back like a jackrabbit. I think I saw another horse's head followin' him, but I couldn't make sure."

"What'll we do?"

"Do!" grunted Rimmy, grimly. "We'll round 'em up first thing, if we can, an' then figure what to do with 'em."

"Jest handle the thing Panther Hills style, you mean—suits us fine!" Blacky laughed grimly.

"We can scatter out an' ride straight to the ridge, keepin' behind the cedars all we can, in case they start shootin'—which I don't think they will. Then we can all—"

Thud!

EVEN as the crack of the carbine drifted down from the high ridges, old Jim's horse sank under him with a moan. The old man scrambled clear of the saddle, and stood an instant holding his thigh, down which a little stream of blood coursed. Then he dodged behind a big cedar, tugging his chap-buckle to get it loose.

"Don't mind me, boys!" he shouted. "It's only a scratch."

"Let's go get 'em!" yelled Rimmy, jerking his gun from its holster.

There came another thud—a hollow-sounding thud. Tom Schubert coughed queerly and slid slowly from his saddle to the ground. His horse danced off with the empty saddle, snorting.

"I'll take care o' him—you boys go on!" shouted old Jim.

Rimmy Bill bared his lips savagely and whirled his horse.

"He's past takin' care of!" he gritted. *"Let's go, boys!"*

Bill heard a shrill, screaming yell beside him, a yell like the sound some savage animal of the cat tribe might make as it hunted fiercely beneath the cedars. He did not need to look to know that it was the dark-faced, flashing-eyed Blacky Spate. A glance showed him that the usually dark face was now white with rage, the black eyes snapping with an insane fire. He grinned a savage approval, and shouted loudly:

"Shoot on sight, boys—an' shoot to kill!"

He dug his spurs into the big sorrel, and crashed recklessly through the trees, not caring whether he exposed himself to the fire of those on the ridge or not. It was a race between himself and Blacky Spate. The sorrel was the fleeter and more powerful horse, but Blacky was a great deal lighter than Rimmy, and rode a far lighter saddle. Reckless though was the pace they set, the other boys kept well up with them until they were almost to the top of the high ridge; then one by one they began falling behind.

"Slack up, Blacky!" warned Rimmy. "Let's wait for the other boys—there may be a gang of them."

Reluctantly Blacky Spate drew his rein tighter. He turned in his saddle to yell:

"What the hell's the matter with you fellers! Come on!"

Then to the top of the ridge they swept on their panting horses. They were clustered too closely for good strategy—they presented an easy target. Rimmy Bill, however, figured that the Horseshoe Bar men would not make a stand against such numbers—it was improbable that they were in as great force as the Rocking Rafter cowboys. He was right. The top of the ridge proved to be deserted when they got there.

"There they go!" shouted Slick Partridge, dashing down the other side of the ridge with most of the others after him pell-mell.

Two there were, however, who had halted their horses for a moment—were Rimmy Bill and Blacky Spate. They leaned over their saddle-horns, staring intently.

"Jest three of 'em," announced Blacky. "That's all. *Let's go get 'em!*"

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

Again came that terrible panther-yell of Blacky's. His horse shot forward with a mighty bound as his spurs sank in its flanks and his quirt raised a welt. The rangy sorrel, not to be outdistanced, sank close to the ground as he too got away with a leap. A few seconds, and the horses were running neck and neck.

They struck the steep, stony side of the ridge, and here Rimmy saw the true value of his horse. The animal swung and swayed dizzily as it went down in mighty leaps among the loose round stones, but not once did it stumble. But always beside it clattered the roan of Blacky Spate's. Rimmy grunted approval—the slender little fellow was a man after his own heart.

They had now caught up with the rear of the cluster of cowboys. Ahead of them they could see Slick Partridge, in the lead, yelling like an Indian and brandishing his six-shooter. Just behind him was Ted Boone on his gray, clutching a carbine across his saddle.

"Look out!" gasped Rimmy.

There was a clattering crash, and Slick and his horse went over in a wild tumble. Ted Boone, unable to check his gray on the very steep hillside, dashed into him, and he too went down.

It was dangerous to rein too rapidly here, but Rimmy and Blacky separated, both managing to avoid the struggling, rolling mass without throwing their own mounts. For a moment they tried to check the gait of their horses a trifle. Blacky Spate glanced inquiringly at the other.

"Let's go!" grunted Rimmy. "There's enough others to take care of 'em if they're hurt, an' we've the best horses."

THE cedars again became dense as they reached the foot of the ridge. Rimmy tried to listen for the others coming behind, but his own crashing and clattering made it difficult to hear. However, as they crossed a small patch of open sand, where they made little noise, he heard a sound ahead—a heavy dead cedar limb breaking from the impact of a running horse's chest.

"There they go!" he grunted to Blacky.

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

"Better not yell any more!" advised Rimmy. "It'll tell 'em jest where we are—an' maybe make 'em run faster."

They flung their horses forward, toward where the sound had come from. Before long they could hear another crack of a breaking limb—and a third and fourth.

"We're gainin'!" grunted Rimmy exultantly.

Both men drew their six-shooters. They spun the cylinders as they rode, to make sure that they worked freely.

"I see 'em!" shouted Blacky.

His pistol cracked, but it was a random shot—he had seen a bare glimpse of fleeing backs through the trees. There came an answering shot, and they saw a green twig flutter from the top of a big cedar ahead.

"That shootin' wont hurt us none!" exclaimed Blacky.

Still they drew closer to the flying Horseshoe Bar men. They could not yet get in a good shot, for they had only infrequent glimpses of the men ahead.

Occasional bullets whooshed over their heads through the cedar tops, but, as they both knew, the man shooting backward from a running horse is at a very big disadvantage compared with the man shooting ahead, because of the awkward position of his body and shooting arm. Indeed, shooting forward from a running horse, despite many stories to the contrary, is very uncertain at the best.

"Let's save our cartridges," murmured Rimmy, "till we get close to 'em."

Almost immediately he shouted:

"Look out—they're splittin'!" And a moment later, the order: "Take the one on your side—I'll get the other!"

THEY swung apart, around a big cedar. Each was close behind the man he pursued. Rimmy at last got a good shot at his man, and fired quickly. He saw the other duck in a manner that told him he had missed by a very narrow margin. He himself ducked too, as a bullet clipped through a cedar limb within two feet of his head, actually throwing bark against his face. Then it struck him how foolish it was to duck when the danger was past.

He saw the man ahead turn slightly to the right, and he whirled his sorrel in an effort to cut ahead. Between two wide-spreading cedars he raced—and threw his horse to its haunches. Ahead of him, stretching from one of the big cedars to the other, lay a many-branched dead tree, barring his road.

"Damn the luck!" he gritted.

He whirled his horse as rapidly as he could in the thick, clinging branches, and forced his way back. Then around the biggest tree he dashed, and away again, having completely lost sight of the other in the few seconds he had lost.

He saw a narrow, long opening in the trees. It would be very slightly out of his way to follow it—but it would allow him to ride faster than he could in the thicket of cedars.

Suddenly Rimmy saw something move behind an algerita bush at one side of the opening, and but a bound or two ahead. It might have been a jackrabbit—it was practically the color of one. But some instinct warned Rimmy Bill, and with more speed than grace he flung himself sidewise from his saddle behind a small cedar. There was another algerita bush there, which partly broke his fall, although the thorny leaves scratched him badly.

And even as he fell,—before he had really left the saddle,—he heard the crack of a carbine, and the thud of a soft-nosed bullet in a cedar limb. His six-shooter matched against the far more powerful and accurate carbine!

He did not need a second glance to know that neither little cedar nor algerita bush offered him either shelter or cover worth mentioning. He sprang to his feet, and again caught a glimpse of the rabbit-colored thing—a cowboy's hat. He fired instantly, below it, through the bush.

A tall, dark-skinned man rose jerkily, dropping a carbine, left arm dangling in a manner that showed it was broken.

"Throw 'em up!" commanded Rimmy.

The other did not seem to hear. It was probably more fear—pure panic—than courage that guided him, but his right hand dropped quickly to his six-shooter, while his eye measured the distance to Rimmy.

There came a *crack*—and Rimmy was walking slowly forward, reloading his gun, while the figure on the ground twitched slightly as it lay on its back, arms outstretched. The six-shooter had never been drawn. There was a slight tang of powder in the air, and a little wisp of whitish smoke drifted behind Rimmy Bill's head as he walked forward.

"About half Mex," murmured Rimmy as he drew the other's revolver, a .44/40, and examined it. "Well, I gave him a chance!"

Suddenly he heard a shot far to the left. Then came another shot, and then several in quick succession.

"Blacky Spate's caught the others!" grunted Rimmy.

HE rushed to his horse and leaped into the saddle. The animal, lathered with sweat and foam though he was, responded splendidly to the rein alone, and raced back as he had come, although his breath came jerkily. For some distance Rimmy rode thus, and then, judging that he must be near where he had heard the shots, he slacked his gait to listen. He was in a predicament—perhaps Blacky was dead. If so, there would be two of the Horseshoe Bar men somewhere in the thicket. But he could not desert Blacky Spate!

And suddenly, close behind him, he heard a horse coming full tilt. He whirled hastily to face it, jerking out his gun and holding it poised. And then, from the direction of the horse, came the yell:

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

"Blacky!" he called. *"Oh, Blacky!"*

Spate crashed from the bushes, thrusting his six-shooter in the holster, and slid his tired horse to a stop.

"Got him!" he grunted. "It was Slim Jackson—one o' the worst cutthroats in the county. I didn't know he'd gone to work for the Horseshoe Bar outfit—he tried to make a livin' tin-hornin' most o' the time, but he was so crooked no one would gamble with him."

"No," said Blacky shortly. "For a cow-thief! He was the worst calf-rustler in Arizona, if not in the world."

"But," murmured Rimmy, bitterly, "the hell of it is that Bulldog got away—the more I think of it, the more sure I am that it was him I saw back there."

"Want to look around for him?"

"No use now; he's had too much start,

At the very edge of the bank, the spill came—horse and rider went over in an ugly tangle.

"I heard the shooting. Must have had quite a battle."

"Yeah, some! When he saw he couldn't get away, he come chargin' back full tilt, knowin' he'd stand a better chance shootin' forward than backward. Shucks! He never could shoot nohow. Did you get Bulldog?"

Rimmy shook his head slowly:

"Shore sorry as hell to say I didn't see him. The feller I was after turned out to be a half-breed Mexican o' some sort—a tricky devil; nearly got me."

"Tall feller with a thin, hooked nose?"

"Yeah."

"That was Apache Steve! He was half Indian, a crack shot, an' twice as tricky as you say he was—that was the Apache in him. I can't say I'm sorry I wasn't the one to tackle him in this brush; I'd likely not be here tellin' about it now. He bragged that he drew a hundred a month from old Pat McMahon—an' rode a gentle string whenever he wanted to, too."

"A hundred a month—for a cowboy!" Rimmy was incredulous.

an' our horses will be no more than able to carry us home. This sorrel did enough for two good horses today."

"All right, let's drift on back."

ARRIVED at the ranch, they found the cowboys very quiet indeed. Tom Schubert lay dead in the bunk-house; Pete Tully was no worse—slightly better, if anything; but there were now two other invalids; old Jim with a bullet through the muscle of his leg, and Ted Boone with a broken collar-bone and arm from the tumble his horse had taken. Slick Partridge, of the broken teeth and hook nose, had escaped serious injury by what seemed a miracle. He was none the worse for his fall but for a black eye of an astonishing variety of colors; how he got it, he did not know.

"Now, that fall," he wailed lugubriously, "I didn't like it worth a damn! Not even worth an old worn-out, second-hand damn —the kind you'd throw out with the empty cans after lookin' it over jest oncet."

Presently Jane entered, with a request that some of them take the shot-gun and

try their luck hunting quail. The doctor had recommended quail broth as food for the invalids.

That night there was an inquest over the body of Tom Schubert, and a verdict of "shot to death by some person unknown." Next evening there was a slow procession going from the ranch, headed by the buckboard with a rough pine coffin. Behind rode a cavalcade of cowboys, many from neighboring ranches. They rode with bared heads bowed, and big hats held in their right hands.

The very start of the funeral had been marred by an unwelcome visitor. As the coffin was being adjusted in the buckboard beside the house, a figure on a bony horse came trotting clumsily through the gate and toward the group. It was Pat McMahon. He rode straight to where Rimmy Bill stood, and began:

"Shure, Bill, 'tis meself is sorry of this, an' I want you to know that I wouldn't have had it happen for anything! Maybe Bulldog held a grudge ag'in' you. I shouldn't have give him that week's notice—I'll fire him tonight. Shure, our outfits have always been friends, an'—"

"Shut up!"

Rimmy was swinging to his saddle. He rode close to the owner of the Horseshoe Bar, and before the other knew what was happening, jerked the reins from his hand. Then he turned and quickly led the starved-looking horse to the gate.

"Keep goin'!" he ordered sharply.

THERE was an ugly look in Rimmy Bill's eye; McMahon saw it, and reluctantly turned his horse away. Then Rimmy reined his own horse across the gateway to stop the roan coming from the house in a lope.

"Where are you goin', Blacky?" he asked.

Spate's lips were thin-drawn and white.

"Jest out fer a little ride, Rimmy, that's all."

"Come on back—let him go. This is no time for anything that way."

Reluctantly Spate turned his horse and rode beside the other back to the buckboard. . . . .

Following the funeral, there were several days of quiet. There was little or no work done, for everyone knew that it was but a lull in the storm, that work mattered little compared to the war with the neighboring outfit.

The invalids improved rapidly the first day or two; and then, to the doctor's chagrin, Pete Tully had a relapse, and had to be removed to the hospital, two mattresses thrown in the bottom of the buckboard serving as a rude ambulance to carry him to the train.

The boys rode a few hours every day, but their riding was disorganized—there was no attempt at system. Rimmy did not often trouble to go with them, although he rode perhaps more than any of them That was what amused the boys—his riding was done mostly in feminine company.

"I don't blame him!" grunted Slick, "Jane was born right here, an' knows the range better'n any of us. That's why he rides with her—to learn the country."

Slick looked innocently at Rimmy with his one functioning eye, and Rimmy turned a vivid red beneath his tan. But despite occasional bantering, they spent more hours together daily, as the patients needed less and less care.

ONE day Rimmy sat alone in the living-room, cleaning and oiling his carbine and six-shooter, and slowly puffing a brown cigarette. Then Jane, who had been attending to the "hospital," as she called it, in the next room, came in. Rimmy looked up from his work.

"Say," he began, "whose six-shooter is that hangin' over near the window there? Whoever it is, is danged careless—lettin' it begin to rust. I was goin' to run a little oil in it, but didn't want to monkey with another man's gun."

Jane's face became grave as she answered:

"That was your uncle's, Rimmy—the one they say he killed himself with; it was found beside him over near the Black Butte, with only the one chamber empty, and a bullet in his head."

"Oh!"

Rimmy fell silent; he had avoided the subject of the suicide since his arrival; and everyone else, respecting his feelings, had also refrained from mentioning it.

"Well," he said, after a long, brooding silence, "I reckon I'll run a little oil in it anyhow—it's a shame to let a good gun rust."

He stood up and walked to the window. He drew the six-shooter from its holster, and held it gingerly in his hand a moment, as though hating to touch it. He held it to the light, and looked between the cylinder and the frame behind it.

"Not loaded," he remarked.

"No," answered Jane. "The sheriff took the cartridges out. He kept it till a day or two before you came, and then turned it over to Dad."

"Ugh!" shuddered Rimmy. "I don't believe I want to clean the danged thing. If you want yores cleaned, jest bring it to me."

"Oh—if you would!"

A few moments later Jane returned with her own six-shooter, a .32/20 on a .45 frame. She found that Rimmy had gone back to his seat at the table, with the old newspaper spread before him on which he had been cleaning the guns. In his hand he still held his uncle's gun.

"Funny," he grunted, "how scared-like I feel o' this gun! It's jest like any other .45. Even the same factory-made black rubber grips that nineteen out o' twenty have—I always liked the checked walnut grip myself."

"So did your Uncle Billy. That's a new gun—he hadn't had it over a month. He'd sent somewhere for the walnut grips for it, but they didn't get here till the day after he was found dead—I don't know where we threw 'em in the excitement."

"I saw 'em on a shelf over there, with a screw-driver beside 'em. Got his old one bucked out o' the holster?"

"Just lost it somewhere running a calf—it fitted too loose in that holster of his. He'd lost it twice before, but had found it both times."

Rimmy drew a bead on a jackrabbit that had ventured close to the house, and snapped the gun.

"Shore light on the trigger—somewhat like my own!" he grunted.

"Why, the last thing I heard old Billy say that morning as he rode away was that it was too heavy a pull for anything, and that he'd sure have to file it down some more that evening!"

"File it down some more! Why, if he did, he'd have to thumb it—the trigger wouldn't catch any more. Try it."

The girl aimed the gun, and pulled the trigger. There came an empty snap.

"Light—well, I reckon it is! I don't know what he was talking about when he said he'd file it down more!"

Rimmy Bill placed the gun on the oily newspaper before him, and sagged back in his chair, staring at it. Jane went to the barn to feed a dogie calf she was raising, but when she came back half an hour later Bill was still there exactly as she had left him, still staring at the gun.

"Oh, put it up, Rimmy!" she said kindly. "Don't let the thing worry you—I know, and Dad knows, that old Billy Hadley didn't kill himself—so does everyone that ever knew him."

"Yo're *shore* he didn't? I never saw him, you know, so I don't know what he was like."

"Yes, Rimmy, I'm quite sure he didn't—he wasn't that kind. As to what he was like, why, there never was a finer old man than Billy Hadley. He was big and tall, like you, but he hadn't been able to get around very much the last year or so—he was getting pretty old. I can see him now, with his white hair and—and—"

SHE broke off chokingly, and then burst out:

"Rimmy, I can't talk about him! He was like another father to me all my life. Maybe it's not right to say it, but I think I loved old Billy just as much as I did Dad—everyone loved him, he was so gentle and kind."

"Doesn't sound like a suicide to me!" grunted Rimmy.

"He wasn't! Oh, don't think *that* of him, and he yore uncle! Some one shot him."

Rimmy spoke quietly:

"Then we'll have to prove it."

"It's too late now—he's been buried a month."

"It's not too late—if we knew how to go about the thing."

"You—you weren't thinking of sending for a detective, were you?"

Rimmy grinned absently.

"Heck, no! What could an Easterner tell about a killin' a month ago on the range! I—I was jest wonderin' what a detective would do now, supposin' he was here, an' supposin' he was a cowboy."

"In other words," smiled Jane, "you're trying to play detective yourself!"

"Why—kinda—that is—"

Absently Rimmy picked up a cleaning rag and oil-can, and polished the gun all over. Still absently, he took another aim, and snapped the trigger.

"When are you going to clean my gun?" asked Jane.

But Rimmy did not seem to hear her. With a strange look in his eye, he sprang from the table and strode hastily to a shelf on the other side of the room. He fumbled

among some magazines a moment, and then drew something forth.

"These the walnut grips he was goin' to use?" he asked.

He did not seem to hear the answer, but hurried back to the table, where he dropped the grip and a small screw-driver. Quickly but carefully he withdrew the one screw that held the rubber grips on the gun, and removed the grips themselves. For a moment he bent over the gun, and then he was hastily replacing the screw.

"Why!" laughed Jane. "You put the same grips back on again! Wake up!"

He strode to a drawer, and thrust the gun in it. Then he turned the key in the lock, and stuck it in his pocket.

"Why, what do you want to lock that old gun up for?" demanded the amazed Jane.

Rimmy jerked his hat from a peg, and hurried to the door.

"Why—why," he muttered, "don't wait supper for me. I have to go to town, to send a telegram to New York—that is, to San Francisco, or somewhere."

JANE stood still, amazed; she was still standing there when Rimmy Bill dashed out of the corral, his wide chaps-wings flapping. He tore to the gate, opened it, and raced through without troubling to close it again, although some of the saddle-horses were near and likely to escape.

In his excitement Rimmy made almost record time between the ranch and the town. Arrived at the station, he strode into the small waiting-room.

"Give me a telegraph blank," he demanded of the station agent, the sole occupant of the station at the time with the exception of a Mexican who lounged against the door jamb, smoking a corn-shuck cigarette with that air of fixity peculiar to the red race to which the majority of Mexicans belong.

"A which?"

The agent took his corn-cob pipe from his mouth and pushed his glasses high on his bald forehead.

"A blank—a telegraph blank!"

"Oh, yes! A blank—here you are. Let's see; where are they?"

The agent had replaced his pipe and was shuffling his feet as though seeking something. As a matter of fact, he stood at a high desk built against the wall, and was hastily scribbling something in pencil on a yellow pad of blanks. Then he threw the pad carelessly to Rimmy Bill.

"A blank, you wanted? Here you are. Here's a pencil to fill it out—if you want to send a wire."

"What the heck do you suppose I'd want with one!" grunted Rimmy, grinning.

"Oh, well, I didn't know!"

The agent returned to his easy chair, and elevated his feet against the open window leading to the platform. Rimmy glanced at the penciled words on the yellow paper:

"I want to see you when the Mex leaves."

PUZZLED, Rimmy filled out his blank, and reread the note. Then he stepped to the ticket window again. The agent, calmly puffing his pipe, told him what the charges would be, and slowly made change. Then he returned to his seat and began to fill his pipe with the air of a man who was settled for the day.

Rimmy glanced at an empty seat, but felt too curious to sit down. Besides, sitting in the waiting-room, and then leaving before a train was due, would look suspicious. Suddenly a brilliant thought came to him. He straightened his hat and chaps as though ready to go, and strode rapidly to the door. There his toe seemed to hang on something, and he stumbled heavily. So heavily did he stumble, indeed, that practically his entire weight was on the small boot-heel that came down twistingly on the Mexican's toes.

"Madre de Diós! Yow-w-w-w!"

"Oh! What? Did I hurt you! I'm so *damned* sorry—"

Rimmy Bill was the picture of astonishment and grief.

The Mexican took one glance at Rimmy's bulky shoulders, gritted his teeth, and started down the platform muttering things that it was just as well Rimmy's very limited knowledge of Spanish did not allow him to understand. Looking solemn as an owl, Rimmy leaned back against the ticket window and winked at the agent, who shook helplessly in his chair with silent mirth.

"Jest like a Hadley!" he grunted at last.

"Know many of 'em?" asked Bill, thinking, of course that his acquaintance had been confined to Billy's.

"Several—several. Yore dad, for one. I was agent over at Caldor when he got shot in the Diamond Bar war."

He rose hastily from his seat, and hurried to the ticket window.

"Listen: you'd better not spend too long a time here, or it might get me in bad—

maybe shot—which would do no one no good, an' might make my wife mad. Heard of the Eads brothers?"

"The gunmen?"

"Yeah. They got off the train this mornin', an' Pat McMahon an' Bulldog Jones were here to meet 'em."

"The heck!"

"Heck is right, son! I thought I'd tell you, so's you could cut back along the railroad an' circle home through the hills where they can't get a shot at you."

For perhaps two minutes Rimmy Bill Hadley stood looking at the floor, against which he absently tapped one boot-toe. Then he looked up innocently, and squared his shoulders.

"Shore sorry, partner, an' thanks for the tip—but I need a sack o' tobacco, an' I figger I'll have to go to the Palace saloon to get it. I'll hurry, though."

"Why, you *danged* young fool! That's jest where the Eadses will be!"

"Oh, Lord! Now I *am* in for it! The Palace has the only good, fresh tobacco in town, accordin' to what I hear the boys say!"

"All right! All right! But if you get yoreself shot to bits, you'll wish you'd listened to an older man, that you will!"

THE agent moved his chair with a loud, irate bang, seated himself in it with a bang, and kicked his shoe-heels down against the window-sill with a third bang. He puffed furiously a time or two, and then, as Rimmy passed the window, jerked the pipe from his mouth to snap:

"Well, go right ahead if you want to, an' good luck to you—you'll need it! Aint it *jest* like a son o' Buck Hadley's!"

Rimmy felt glad that his gun was newly oiled as he mounted his sorrel and turned away from the railroad. He did not take the main street, but followed the rutted track, almost knee-deep in dust, that formed the street parallel with it on the west. He had seen the front of the Palace Saloon—the most pretentious building in the little cow-town—on the day of his arrival, and now was trying to recognize the back of it.

Had they all been rehearsing for a week, they could not have tumbled out of range with more speed. . . . . Then the tension snapped; the room resounded with crashing roars.

"Yep—that is she, as the dude said to the cow," he grunted.

Behind the big building was an empty, dilapidated shed, and in this he quietly tied his horse. A glance showed him that no one was looking, and so he quickly removed his six-shooter from the holster and glanced it over critically. He spun the cylinder, and worked the hammer back and forth a time or two, to make sure that there was no sand in the mechanism where it might do harm. Then he thrust the gun back into the holster, walked quickly around to the front of the saloon, and stepped quietly through the door.

"Anyone here by the name o' Eads?" he asked loudly.

THERE was consternation in the room. The piano-player stopped suddenly in the middle of a bar, and thrust first one leg and then the other through an open window that happened to be near. Once on the ground outside the window, he still kept thrusting one leg in front of the other, so that soon he was out of pistol range of the saloon.

Early though it was, there were a good many men in the saloon—cowboys, mostly, with a miner or two from the Big Chief gold-mine near Caspar Mountain, a couple of tattered, bewhiskered prospectors, a mule-skinner, and a slouching sheep-herder with the furtive air of a sheep-stealing dog. Had they all been rehearsing the thing a week, they could not have tumbled to each side of the room, out of range, with more speed than they did.

There were several card-tables at the far end of the very long room. All but one had been occupied when Rimmy first spoke, but within two seconds they were deserted, cards and poker chips still lying where the players had dropped them. All but one, that is! Behind this one green-baize-covered table stood two men, shoulder to shoulder. They were almost alike as two peas—rather small, very slender, with tiny, waxed black moustaches and long white hands. On the faces of both was the same identical sneering smile. One of them answered, in a high-pitched, squeaky voice:

"I'm Lee Eads, an' this is my brother Jesse. Lookin' for us?"

"I thought maybe you might be lookin' for me. I'm Bill Hadley, o' the Rockin' Rafter."

There was a slight tightening of the muscles around the eyes of the brothers, but they gave no other sign. For a moment they stared at the tall young cowboy near the door, and he stared back at them with almost as little lack of expression. The others in the room scarcely dared breathe, such was the tension.

THEN the tension snapped. Rimmy had seen a huge cast-iron stove in the corner near him. With two cat-like bounds he was behind it, and crouched on one knee on the floor.

The room resounded with crashing roars; then Jesse Eads was lying under a card-table, kicking queerly. His foot struck a leg of the table, and it went over on top of him, almost concealing him.

There was a big steel safe near where the Eads brothers had been standing. Rimmy had feared that one of them would get behind this, and that, in spite of all he could do, was what he had allowed Lee Eads to accomplish.

There was another moment of terrible tension, and then Rimmy felt the cold stove twitch against his shoulder, and heard a tinkle of broken cast iron above the roar a .45 makes when discharged indoors. Barely showing one hand and eye, he took a quick shot at the hand and eye that bobbed out from behind the safe. The shooting was uncertain, for the room was filled with smoke almost to the point of suffocation.

The smoke grew thicker, until shooting was largely guesswork, and Rimmy's ears rang as the deafening noise of the reports echoed from the walls. Then he heard something give way above his head, and the stove-pipe came crashing down on him, the cast-iron rim on the stove over which it fitted having been shot away. Not so good!

Rimmy knew what a poor breastwork the stove made, for a bullet striking it at the proper angle could go through it easily—it could deflect a bullet, and not stop it. On the other hand, the big safe, lined with thick asbestos and walled with steel, could stop even the metal-jacketed bullet of a rifle, not to speak of the soft lead slug of the revolver.

Sometimes one fired, sometimes the other, but neither seemed to be doing any damage. Then the whole top of the stove toppled sidewise, to the ground—the cast iron cracked easily. And Rimmy knew he had to take quick action now.

HE crouched to run to the safe, and a sudden thought struck him. Keeping as well behind the stove as he could, he dropped his gun and wrenched off first one boot and then the other, each with a quick twist. Then he picked up his gun again, reloaded it, and crouched against the stove. The whole thing had taken mere seconds, so fast had his hands worked in the excitement.

He felt a tug at his hat, and judged that the top of it had appeared above the stove. Then he again ventured a hand and eye around the corner of the crumbling stove, and took a quick aim.

Quick though he was, Lee Eads was quicker, for he had been waiting for his chance to shoot. His bullet clipped a piece off Rimmy's right ear. The gun had scarcely crashed before Eads was out of

sight again behind the safe, to duck the bullet he expected—indeed, if he had not been so anxious to get back to cover, his shooting might have been better, and the Rocking Rafter war might have ended right then.

Rimmy did not shoot, but left his cover with a mighty bound. Down the length of the room he leaped, his stocking feet making so little sound that one would scarcely notice it after the crashing of the guns. The safe stood in the open, away from all walls, and Lee Eads, of course, was turned to his right, to the side from which he was ready to shoot the instant he heard the expected crash of the other's gun.

And then Lee Eads jerked his head forth, his gun poised. He saw something bound toward his safe, so close that he would have to go forward to another corner to shoot at it. He whirled, springing to his feet as he did so, a terror suddenly striking him that the other would come on him from behind.

Two guns crashed almost at once—indeed, it did seem to be at once. There came a moan, and a slumping thud.

"Anyone else here lookin' for any Rockin' Rafter men?" asked a high-strung, tense voice.

IT was Rimmy's voice, although he scarcely recognized it himself. He looked dazedly around, but the room seemed to be empty. Then the bartender's head appeared from behind the bar, and presently three more heads. That was all were in the room—the others had somehow disappeared through doors and windows during the shooting.

"Good God!" gasped the bartender. "You don't mean to say that you got 'em both?"

"Looks like it—but at that I lost about half my right ear. Where could I find a doctor to sew it up?"

It took some time to find a doctor. Then a good deal of time was spent in hunting up old Dick Spearman, proprietor of the only dry-goods store in town, which had closed for the evening—for Rimmy's clothes were badly soiled with blood, and new ones had to be obtained. He was anxious to leave town, for everywhere he went a curious crowd followed. Besides, he did not know just what the sheriff would have to say of the affair, nor did he know whether there was a deputy sheriff stationed in the little cow-town or not.

In spite of his haste, it was over two hours, and pitch dark, before ear and clothing had been attended to. Then, while the crowd waited outside, he slipped quietly through the rear door of Dick Spearman's store, and had reached his horse before anyone had realized what he was doing. Still following the back street, he quickly made his way to the cedars at the edge of the town, circled through them to the Rocking Rafter road, and was soon well along on his way home. . . . .

It seems to be a trait of human nature all over the world to wish to be the first to carry astonishing news. A red-faced little cowboy who had just lost his last half-dollar as Rimmy entered the door had suddenly conceived the idea that the Rocking Rafter, famous for hospitality, would be good place for a totally insolvent range-rider to spend the night. This son of the saddle, Tige Simms, broke all known records for catching, saddling and mounting a horse in the corral behind the saloon. He was well on his way to the ranch even before the surviving principal of the fight had had his ear attended to.

The moon rose, bright and clear, before Rimmy had gone a mile from the little town. He jogged along steadily, feeling very weary and dispirited—as one always does after such intense excitement as he had been through. Halfway to the ranch, he suddenly stopped his horse, as he heard a distant sound—or thought he did. For some time he listened intently.

He had heard the sound this time for a certainty—a horse coming from the direction of the ranch at a reckless pace.

"Now, who the heck could that be!" he grunted.

He reined swiftly into a dense clump of cedars, drew his gun and waited. It was a very short wait, for the rider was already in sight, sweeping down the boulder-strewn road, which resembled a stream-bed more than anything else.

AND then the rider swept by him, hunched over the saddle-horn.

"What the—" Rimmy grunted.

There could be no mistaking the sound he had heard—a sob! Suddenly the truth flashed to him—it was Jane Dignan!

"Jane! Jane!" he yelled.

He dashed the spurs into the sorrel, and leaped after her. She slid her own mount to such a quick stop that he almost collided with her.

"Why, Jane, what's the matter? Tell me, hon!"

It was the first time he had used a pet name, but she seemed not to notice.

"Oh, Rimmy! Tige Simms said you'd been shot—that you were all covered with blood all over! Tell me, Rimmy, are you hurt?"

Their horses drifted very close together, and somehow their hands became entangled.

"No, Janie, I'm all right. The doctor says I'll have a square top on my right ear the rest o' my life, but that don't amount to nothin'."

"Oh," she gasped, "old Billy shot dead, then Dad wounded, and now you! I'll never draw a peaceful breath till this awful trouble with the Horseshoe Bar is over! *Can't* we make peace, somehow?"

For a moment Rimmy was silent. Then he spoke, slowly, and in a low voice:

"Janie, this thing'll be settled within a few days—I'll see to that. But there's only one way to settle it."

IF Rimmy had been acknowledged as a natural leader on the Rocking Rafter before, he now was looked up to with an almost doglike fidelity by his cowboys.

Again there were days of little or no work, but steadily the air of tension grew greater. There were purchases of several new .30/30 carbines, and one or two new revolvers. A great deal of ammunition was purchased, at the expense of the outfit. There was shooting to be heard all day on some part of the range or other, as the Rocking Rafter men "sighted in" their carbines, and tried to become thoroughly accustomed to their new six-shooters.

There was another thing that no one liked, Rimmy himself least of all. That was the new hands that were being hired. One by one they would drift in to the ranch, never in pairs, and Rimmy hired them with few words. A cold-eyed crowd they were, too lazy to do anything but keep their guns shining with oil and rubbing. They drew twice the wages of the old hands, and did nothing to earn it. They walked with a sort of slow, deadly swagger, and distrusted each other as much as Rimmy distrusted the lot. The old Rocking Rafter hands they treated with a sneering contempt, and each other they watched with cold and jealous eyes. Why war did not break out among themselves was a mystery. Quietly, deadly truculent they were, on all occasions but one: When Rimmy came among them, they moved deferentially out of his way. Who would challenge the supremacy of the man who had shot it out with the Eads brothers single-handed? An undesirable lot they were, and a blight on the face of the Rocking Rafter—but twice as many of their kind were now quartered at the Horseshoe Bar, as everyone knew, and one had to fight the devil with fire.

And then, suddenly, the war reached its last stages. . . . .

It was the afternoon of a hot day, and several of the boys were shoeing horses near the house. The others were busy at various other small tasks, such as the mending of chaps and saddles. Rimmy and Blacky Spate were engaged in the tedious job of preparing a cowhide to be made into a *reata,* or rawhide rope, and had reached the stage of scraping the hair from the strips of skin. The new hands—the gun-men—were, as usual, sitting morosely here and there in the shade, smoking incessantly. Their surly, sullen disposition seemed to have been caught, like some pestilent disease, by the old hands of the ranch. No one had much to say, and what little was said had better been left unsaid, for it was of the kind that rankles. Of course the heat was partly to blame, but more to blame was the strain of expectancy that had daily been growing upon everyone.

"Damn it!" grunted Rimmy, "I can't stand this much longer—but I hate to jest gather the boys an' ride over to the Horseshoe Bar to shoot it up."

Blacky peevishly rolled a cigarette.

"Well," he grunted, for the first time showing irritation with Rimmy, "if you wont do that, what the hell do you—"

HE broke off suddenly, as he heard quickly approaching hoofs. Slick Partridge, who had been in town, sprang from his horse and handed Rimmy a telegram. Rimmy tore the envelope open, withdrew the yellow slip, and read it slowly. Then his face grew white under his tan, as he folded the paper and returned it to the envelope.

"Boys," he said, "Pete Tully died last night in the hospital."

There was a moment while the three stood in silence. Then—there came a queer thumping sound; and Slick Partridge was lying in the sand, his head twisted back at a strange angle.

Then Rimmy saw the flash of the sun on steel; he had raced into a trap! "Back, boys, for God's sake!"

"What—what—" Rimmy was unable to realize what had happened.

Then the sand flew against Rimmy's boots. This time he heard plainly the crack of a carbine on the high ridge. Perhaps it was because he had become so much accustomed to shooting around the house the last few days that he had not heard the first shot; more probably it was the shock of Slick's sudden collapse that had confused his senses for the moment. Then he felt Blacky Spate seize his arm:

"To the blacksmith shop, Rimmy! It's you they're tryin' to get!"

Another bullet came, passing close to his head—he thought he could feel the wind of it on his cheek.

"For God's sake hurry, Rimmy!" Blacky gave him a shove.

For a moment Rimmy stood there, and then his voice raised.

"Horses, boys—an' guns! Let's go-o-o!"

He ran to his own horse, and as he did so he heard the wild yell behind him:

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

"Carry Slick to the house!" he yelled. A glance had showed him that Slick's neck was broken by the bullet—that death had been instantaneous.

There was a minute of seemingly hopeless confusion. Men were running everywhere. Horses were snorting. And then Rimmy was dashing toward the ridge, a knot of men around him. Behind came the others. Before the leaders had gone a hundred yards, the last man was scrambling into his saddle and dashing after.

Rimmy heard the cracking of carbines behind him, and glanced back to see old Jim, his daughter Jane, and Ted Boone. The last was shooting under difficulties, because of his broken arm and collar bone. The three were shooting with their carbines resting on the two windows of the house that faced the ridge. Rimmy breathed a prayer of thankfulness for their assistance, for their steady peppering of the ridge would distract the attention of the men hidden there, who would otherwise have found the cluster of men approaching in the open below them an easy mark.

THE shooting on the ridge had ceased before Rimmy struck the first slope. He slacked his pace, to permit the last of his men to catch up, and then tackled the steep incline. As the horses plunged upward through the cedars, he felt that the crest of the ridge would be unoccupied. Now, as he looked back at it, he realized that there had been but one man shooting

at him—probably some picked rifleman sent to put him out of the way.

He was right. There was no one to be found on the ridge, and the ground was so dry and hard that tracking would be next to impossible. For a short distance he continued on at the head of his men, and then drew rein in a little open spot on the other slope of the ridge. He noticed, for the first time, that his followers had somehow divided into two parts. There were the old hands of the Rocking Rafter clustered around him, and a short distance off, the new men—the gun-men. This was not strange, for the two bands had never mixed. Then one of the new men came riding forward—a dandified-looking ruffian with a sneering mouth, and a limp when he walked—a relic of some old gun-fight.

"Rimmy," he began, "us boys have been talkin' it over, an' we decided you're not payin' us enough for the resk we're taking."

"Well?"

"Why, we'll have to get fifty dollars each extra every time there's a fight like this, if you want us to stay."

"Hell of a time you picked to ask for it!" grunted Rimmy.

THE other sneered. "Why, we thought it was the right time—when yo're in a pinch an' have to have us."

"*Have* to have you! There's where yo're wrong, cowboy. I don't need you now or any other time. Yo're fired right now—the whole yellow-dog gang of you! Get back to the ranch an' roll yore beds an' *drift*."

"See here, Rimmy—"

The other's eyes flashed a moment, but Rimmy glared back at him.

"See nothin'! Yo're all fired—yo're no good nohow! Get out!"

The other hesitated. His hand trembled a moment, as though he meant to draw. But his eyes fell, and he turned away with a leering scowl.

"Oh-h-h—"

It was a wild scream. The gun-man clutched his saddle-horn a moment with both hands, while his face twisted with agony. He swayed back and forth in the saddle. Then his hands relaxed, and he toppled down beside the horse's neck. From the narrow, cedar-strewn little draw below them came the crack of a carbine. The gun-man had unwittingly ridden between Rimmy and his would-be assassin just at the instant the trigger was pulled.

"Let's go-o, boys!" cried Rimmy.

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee-ee!" yelled Blacky.

DOWN the steep side of the ridge, through the cedars, tore the cowboys, Rimmy at their head. They had got a bare glimpse of the shooter as he fled hastily after the one shot.

The little cluster of gun-men were racing down the hill too, mingling with the others. They pretended that they had not heard Rimmy's remarks to their spokesman, although they had been so close that most, at least, of what he had said could not have escaped them.

The cedars thinned out somewhat as they reached the level floor of the little draw. They had not gone far when a bullet kicked up the earth among them, and another left a cedar twig dangling and swaying above their heads. Again they caught a bare glimpse of the rifleman, in the little pass at the head of the draw they were following—too far off for good shooting. Rimmy yelled:

"Let's ride, boys, an' we can catch him: it's pretty open country beyond the pass, an' he can't get away!"

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee!" came the screaming yell of Blacky Spate as his roan plunged through the scattered cedars beside Rimmy's big sorrel.

They were almost at the pass. The draw had narrowed until it was scarcely more than a wide cañon with sharply sloping sides. Through this gorge they plunged madly, each man anxious to be first to reach the pass—first to sight the fleeing rifleman. Suddenly a feeling of uneasiness swept over Rimmy. He glanced from one side to the other—steep slopes crowned by cedars were all he saw.

And then he saw something else, something that made his blood run cold. It was the flash of the sun on steel above him—on a rifle-barrel, he well knew.

"Back, boys! For God's sake—"

Even as he reined his horse, the shower of lead came, from both sides. He had raced head-on into the trap that had been set for him and his men. A horse dropped groaning beside him. His big sorrel screamed and jumped as a bullet burned its leg.

"Ride to that clump of big cedars—they can't see us there!"

That was Rimmy Bill's yelled order. But another order was heard, in a strained, high-pitched voice:

"Back to the ranch, boys! Let's run for it or they'll get us!"

As is always the case in an emergency, the crowd divided into two parts. To the spreading cedars raced Rimmy, the old Rocking Rafter hands after him to a man. And back down the little draw, in wild confusion, fled the men he had hired to fight. They would fight, but only when the odds were all in their favor—and they would prefer to shoot a man in the back.

Blacky Spate threw up his six-shooter to fire, not to the ridges, but after the fleeing figures. But Rimmy seized his wrist in a viselike grip and turned the gun up.

"Don't!" he grunted. "Let 'em go—they're not worth wastin' lead on!"

A few bullets dropped through the thick branches, but the men and their horses were fairly well concealed. Of course if the shooting kept up long, or was concentrated on their cover, they would have to leave—what was left of them. So far, by some miracle, not a man was lost, and only one was afoot.

"Here they come!" Blacky grunted.

"Let's get out—they're too many for us!" exclaimed some one.

Rimmy glanced through the branches. Down the very steep sides of the ridges poured the attacking horsemen, on both sides. The Rocking Rafter men were outnumbered so badly that they stood practically no show. Rimmy, far from a coward though he was, was no fool. Neither did he wish unnecessarily to sacrifice his men.

"Let's make a run for it!" he shouted. "It's our only chance!"

The boys gathered up their reins.

"Wait, boys, till I give the word, an' we'll dash out together."

They pointed their horses one way, as nearly as they could without leaving the cover.

"All right, boys; let's— No—*wait!*"

RIMMY threw up his hand, and again peered at the men coming down the hill.

"We got 'em, boys! They don't know we're here—they're followin' that gang o' yellow dogs that ran away, an' think that's all of us!"

It was the truth. The Horseshoe Bar men were not coming toward Rimmy and his cowboys, but were dashing down the incline so as to strike the level draw some distance below them, bent on the pursuit of the fleeing gun-men.

"Hide, boys, whatever you do! Wait till they're all down, an' we'll get in behind 'em an' give 'em hell."

The men scarcely dared breathe as they sat fidgeting on their horses, guns drawn. The excitement communicated itself to the horses, which shifted their feet and champed at the bits nervously, trying to run.

"There's a lot of 'em!" some one grunted, but it was more an idle remark than an expression of fear.

"Yes," scoffed Rimmy Bill. "There is—a lot o' hired gun-men. And we've jest seen what *they're* made of! Make all the racket you can when we start—yell yore heads off, an' make 'em think it's an army."

There was just a moment more of waiting tensely; then Rimmy's voice raised:

"Let's go! *Yip-ip-ee-ee-ee!*"

"Yoo-ee-ee-ee-ee!" came the long-drawn scream of Blacky; never had it sounded more like some Apache war-whoop!

THEIR revolvers roared together as they tore madly from the clump of dense cedars. Where they rode, the cedars were of course much more thinly scattered, but still there were plenty to prevent the men ahead of them from knowing the numbers of their pursuers.

Consternation seized the Horseshoe Bar men, particularly the professional gun-men. They had inflicted comparatively little damage on the men ahead of them because of the long range. Now they momentarily expected those whom they had been pursuing to turn on them, and thus they would be caught between two fires.

The Horseshoe Bar riders, on the other hand, had such a lead on Rimmy and his men that they were not suffering greatly—unless the mental suffering of their terror could be counted. They had a good lead, and their sole purpose in life seemed to be to make it still greater. This was particularly true of the hired fighters; like their brothers of Rimmy's employ, they scattered quickly and incontinently, leaving the others to their fate.

"Let the gun-men go!" shouted Rimmy. "We've nothin' to do with 'em. Keep after the Horseshoe Bar men as long as they hang together."

His revolver spat, and a rider tumbled from his saddle. Bullets were coming back, of course, but they did little damage, as might be expected from men shooting backward from running horses.

"Some of 'em are droppin' out in the cedars!" warned Blacky Spate.

"Let 'em go! Keep after the bunch until they're all scattered."

Little by little the gang ahead of them dwindled. Some, to be sure, had been accounted for by the shooting of Rimmy and his men, but the majority had just dodged to one side one at a time when some particularly thick stretch of cedars was being passed through. The men whose horses were fastest clung together.

"We're darned near to the Horseshoe Bar headquarters!" warned Blacky.

"Are we? That's good!"

"But there's a thick cedar-brake right ahead! They'll get away shore!"

"Let 'em go!"

PRESENTLY they struck the edge of the cedar-brake. Rimmy threw up his hand, and slowed his horse that he might study the tracks on the ground.

"Damn!" grunted Blacky bitterly, "They've scattered every way! What'll we do now? Go home?"

Rimmy gathered up his reins, and spoke softly, distinctly:

"No—not home. Let's go on to the Horseshoe Bar. Got plenty of matches, boys?"

For an instant they failed to catch his meaning. Then Blacky Spate's dark face lighted up with a fierce joy.

"That's it! Burn that nest o' rattlesnakes."

He dashed the spurs into his horse to lead the way, for Rimmy did not know the ground here.

"Let's go, boys! *Yoo-ee-ee-ee!*"

They swung through the cedar-brake and across a little valley of reddish sand, and down like a whirlwind on the Horseshoe Bar headquarters. The Chinese cook, seeing them coming, fled wildly to the cedars beyond the house, but they did not notice him. They scattered, some to the houses, others to the big barn, and one even to the little blacksmith shop. There was a moment of silence, and then little curls of smoke arose. And then crackling sounds could be heard, which grew louder and louder until they merged a steady roar.

"Let's get back home, boys!" shouted Rimmy. "We have our own houses to watch—and I'd as soon trust Bulldog an' his men as that bunch o' skunks that was workin' for me and quit when I needed 'em."

They reined away, and rode in a steady, swinging trot on their tired horses. As the cedars swallowed them, they turned, just in time to see the roof of the main ranch-house collapse. A tremendous pile of smoke was mounting from the hay in the barn. A man or two came riding at break-neck speed from the edge of the cedars farther down.

"Let 'em go!" spat Rimmy, as some of his men stopped. "Let 'em go, an' let 'em get within' fifty feet of any of the buildings if they can! Maybe they'll wish they'd left those poor boys of ours alive now, instead o' shootin' 'em down like rabbits, without givin' 'em a ghost of a chance!"

The sun was just setting as they rode over the high ridge and came in sight of the Rocking Rafter. Rimmy's heart leaped to his mouth. The ranch presented a strange, deserted appearance.

"Good Lord!" he grunted. "Has something happened?"

"Looks like it!" exclaimed Blacky, thunder-struck.

THEY settled in their saddles, preparatory to driving the spurs home in the flanks of their tired horses. And then the ranch-house door opened, and Jane came forth, a wide pan in her hands. From all around could be seen little hurrying, bustling dots—she was feeding the chickens their evening meal. It looked calm and peaceful now, that ranch-house in the sandy flat, with the broad red floor of solid rock behind it. A girl feeding chickens! What a contrast to the tired cowboys riding home, their guns reeking with powder-smoke, their clothes with the smoke of the rival ranch buildings. It was Blacky who first understood what made the place seem strange and silent.

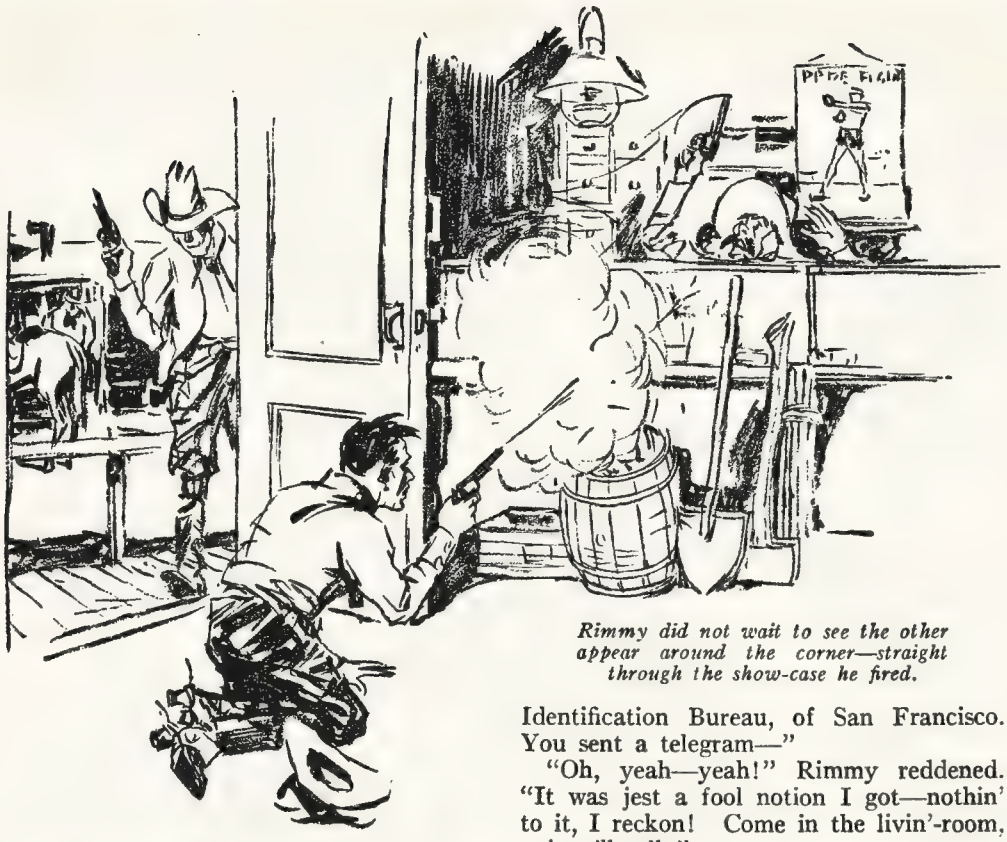
"Why," he gasped, "the gun-men have all gone—there's not one of their horses in sight!"

They hurried down, and no sooner had they come from the cedars, to where they could be seen, than Jane dropped her pan among the chickens and came running to meet them. At the door of the ranch-house were grouped the others, and with them a stranger in the garb of the towns.

"Anyone hurt?" demanded Jane.

Rimmy shook his head.

"Only Horseshoe Bar men. Did Tom get in all right? His horse was shot under him."



Rimmy did not wait to see the other appear around the corner—straight through the show-case he fired.

"Yes—he walked in long ago, and told us of how you got behind the Horseshoe Bar men and chased them."

Old Jim was hobbling forward on a cane.

"How'd you come out?" he demanded.

"How!" answered Rimmy succinctly. "We scattered 'em good—shot a few. We wound up by burnin' every buildin' o' the Horseshoe Bar."

He glanced around curiously, and then asked:

"What became o' the other fellows? Did they quit sudden?"

Old Jim grinned:

"Why, Tom had jest got through tellin' us how they turned tail, when this man" (he indicated the stranger) "rode up an' asked for you. I passed the word around that he was a United States Marshal. Say—you should have seen those fellers skin out!" He chuckled again.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" grunted Rimmy.

The stranger was coming forward. He was a thin, bookish-looking young fellow with big glasses and rounded shoulders.

"This Mr. Hadley?" he asked.

"Yeah—Rimmy Bill for short."

"I'm John Drayton, of the Criminal Identification Bureau, of San Francisco. You sent a telegram—"

"Oh, yeah—yeah!" Rimmy reddened. "It was jest a fool notion I got—nothin' to it, I reckon! Come in the livin'-room, an' we'll talk."

The others glanced at each other in amazement. Rimmy had wired for a man from the Criminal Identification Bureau of San Francisco! What on earth could be his reason for that! They burned with curiosity—but there was only one thing they could do, and that was to keep away from the living-room while Rimmy and his guest were locked in there. Jane lit the oil lamp and left them.

ONCE seated, Rimmy turned to the other and began:

"Did you hear anything in town of how my Uncle Billy killed himself?"

"Not a thing. The minute I got off the train, I went to the livery stable, hired a horse and saddle, and rode out here."

"Well, it's easy told: He was found shot under a cedar out on the range. One bullet in his head, an' powder-burns around it on his hair. There was a .45 beside him—jest an inch or two from his hand. The coroner gave a verdict of suicide while temporarily insane—jest why the insane, no one could ever figure out."

The stranger was silent, and Rimmy spoke again.

"We don't believe he killed himself. He

was fightin' the Horseshoe Bar—Pat McMahon's outfit– an' we think some of 'em killed him."

Drayton shook his head slowly.

"Seems a clear case of suicide, I'm sorry to say. Anyway, I'm afraid the thing is entirely out of my line; I'm not a detective, you know—just identify men after they're caught, or when fingerprints are found the duplicates of which are on file."

"That's it! Accordin' to what Jane Dignan says, Uncle Billy left the house with a six-shooter with a heavy pull. The one they found beside him had a light pull."

"Oh, a different revolver! Why did they call it suicide, then?"

"Why, everyone thought it was the same gun; it was jest a regular .45, same make, with rubber grips, like nineteen cowboys out of twenty carry. It was nearly new, so it looked jest like any other nearly new single-action."

"I'm afraid—"

"But the pull couldn't have lightened itself!"

"It could, possibly. A little piece of metal could have broken from either the sear or the notch it fits in—particularly if either had been filed down as I hear most cowboys file down the pull on their guns. Anyway, I fail to see what I can do for you."

"Here—look at the gun."

Rimmy strode across the room, unlocked the drawer, and returned with the heavy revolver.

The other man took it in his hand.

"I see," he remarked dryly, "that some one's been very careful to polish and oil the gun so as to remove all fingerprints that might be on it."

"I did that before I thought. Anyway, everyone from the sheriff on down had handled it," said Rimmy defensively.

"I suppose so—they generally do! I'm sorry, Mr. Hadley, but there isn't a thing I can do for you."

"Jest wait a minute!"

RIMMY had been removing the screw that held the grips to the frame. Now he carefully took off first one grip and then the other, and laid them inside up on the table. He held the gun by the barrel, and offered it to the other.

"Careful—don't touch anything but the barrel!" he warned.

"Whew!" whistled the other in amazement.

He drew a small magnifying-glass from his pocket, held the revolver close to the lamp, peered at it an instant, and again whistled.

"Greasy fingerprints all over it from whoever filed it down! I couldn't have made them plainer myself if I were making them to file!"

"Look at those, too."

Rimmy handed him the grips, and pointed to the inside surfaces.

"Still more—although they're not necessary."

He again studied the articles, but suddenly turned to Rimmy:

"By Jove, that was a neat piece of headwork you did—discovering those prints on the inside of the gun! If you should ever go broke in the cattle business, come to San Francisco and I'll guarantee you a job as detective—you're a good one by instinct. I'd never have thought of that myself in a thousand years!"

Rimmy shifted uncomfortably, as he always did under praise. The other continued:

"Now, the next thing is to find some fingerprints of your uncle, to prove that those aren't his."

"Why," grunted Rimmy, "that can't be done now, of course. We'll have to find some one with prints that match these—an' I think I know jest where to find him."

The other smiled.

"Can't be done? Evidently you don't know much of the fingerprint game. Why, I'll bet the house here is full of his prints, if we knew just where to find them. Would you mind calling Miss Dignan—she's the one who'll know where to look for them."

The matter was soon explained to Jane. She was eager at first, but after a moment's thought she shook her head.

"I'm afraid it's been too long now. I've cleaned the whole house up a dozen times since he died."

"That makes no difference. Wasn't there something he handled, and no one else—say, for instance, a book?"

Jane paused, uncertainly, before she spoke. Then, suddenly, she hurried to the shelf where the magazines and books lay.

"Why, yes! There's a book in Spanish, *'El Sombrero de Tres Pecos,'* by Alarcón! He was the only one could read Spanish, although we all speak it more or less."

"Good! Let's see."

Drayton ran through the leaves hastily.

"Evidently old Mr. Hadley had a habit

of reading without troubling to wash his hands!" he commented.

"Why," defended Jane, "he was getting old, and couldn't stand to work steadily a hot day. He'd often come in to rest awhile, and he'd pick up some book to read a few minutes. He sometimes wouldn't trouble to wash, as he'd be going right back to work."

"So he left fingerprints all over this book. About two full sets to a page, I should say." The expert seemed highly pleased.

"How long," asked Rimmy, "will it take you to tell if they're the same as those in the gun?"

DRAYTON laughed, closed the book, and threw it carelessly on the table.

"How long? Why, I can tell you now—I don't have to make chemical analysis, or anything of that sort. Those in the gun are of an entirely different type from those in the book."

Jane glanced at them triumphantly.

"Didn't I tell you Billy Hadley never did kill himself?"

"But," remarked Drayton, "that isn't catching the man who *did* kill him—although clearing his name of the charge of suicide means a great deal, of course."

"Well, yo're dang tootin' it does!" exclaimed Rimmy Bill. "Anyway, no one had anything against him but the Horseshoe Bar men. All you'll have to do will be to take their fingerprints an' find which of 'em will be like those in the gun."

"I'm afraid I don't see how we can legally compel them to allow me to take those prints."

"Oh, that's easy! The boys an' I will jest round 'em up for you, an' take a shot at any of 'em don't like it!"

"Heavens, what a system you have out here! I thought that way of doing things had ended years ago!"

"It hadn't. It's the only way that always works here. The law's jest nachully too slow an' too uncertain back here in the mountains."

"Well, I don't want to get mixed up in your shooting scrapes, as you call them. On the other hand, I'm very anxious to see this mystery cleared up. I don't see what to do."

"That's easy! If the Horseshoe Bar men come to you an' ask you to take their fingerprints, wont you do it?"

"Surely!" grinned Drayton.

"All right! Let's go to bed, then."

"I think I'll make photos of both sets of prints first. I can develop them in the kitchen, and print from wet negatives to save time. The prints will be dry in the morning."

"Fine. When you get ready to turn in, you can use that bed in the next room."

NEXT morning a little group of four rode slowly up the ridge from the Rocking Rafter and turned along the road toward town. They rode slowly because old Jim had insisted on going along, despite the fact that the bullet-wound in his thigh had not yet healed. For that matter, they could not ride too slowly to suit Drayton, who, although he said he had been reared on a farm, had not mounted a horse for years, until the day before.

Jane was there ostensibly to take care of her father, but everyone suspected strongly that she was just as curious as the others regarding the fingerprinting of the Horseshoe Bar men. Rimmy Bill felt sure that it would be necessary to go no farther than Bulldog Jones. It was for this reason that they were going to town—Bulldog was sure to have gone there the night before to report the battle with the Rocking Rafter men and the burning of the buildings to his employer, Pat McMahon.

"I myself," said Drayton, as they rode along, "am pretty sure that it must have been this fellow you call Bulldog that did it—he seems to be the sort that would."

"Sort that would!" grunted Rimmy. "Well, I reckon! He's the sort that would steal the gold fillin' out o' his gran'mother's teeth! Besides, who else would have done it?"

"That's it! This McMahon wouldn't have done it himself; that's a certainty. He'd have thought it safer to hire some one else to do it."

"Besides not havin' the nerve!" murmured Jim, twisting in the saddle trying to find a more comfortable position for his wounded leg.

Drayton took a package of cigarettes from his pocket and held it out to the other men, who shook their heads suspiciously and reached for their "makin's." The fingerprint expert blew a puff of white smoke in the air before he spoke:

"Of course there was that half-breed Apache—"

Rimmy shook his head:

"No, leave him out. He carried a .44/40 an' shot soft-nosed bullets."

"Well, I'm certainly anxious to get a glance at this Bulldog's fingers!"

ALTHOUGH they rode steadily, so slow was their pace that it was eleven-thirty when they swung down the dusty street.

"Where do we go first?" asked old Jim.

"Anywhere that I can get out of this saddle!" moaned Drayton. "It makes it still worse for me to see the rest of you riding as if you grew on horses!"

"Which we about did!" answered Jane.

"Well," began Rimmy, "we might as well go to the livery-stable an' leave our horses. Then we can— Say!" he broke off, "there goes Bulldog an' Pat now—into that hardware store!"

"They're ready to leave town!" exclaimed Jim. "There are their horses at the hitching-rack."

"Well," grunted Rimmy, "that changes things. Best thing we can do is ride down there an' have a chat with 'em before they get away. That is—I'll go. The rest of you might stay here, in case he argues."

"I'm goin' with you!" murmured old Jim. "I aint lame none in the right hand."

"Oh, Dad!" exclaimed Jane.

"No need!" soothed Rimmy. "Old Pat wont do anything, an' if Bulldog does—well—"

"Oh, all right!" agreed Jim resignedly. "Anyway, Bulldog wont draw on you—after that affair with the Eads boys the other day."

"But," asked Drayton in astonishment, "isn't it against the law for you to wear your revolver in town this way?"

"It is, but a feller has to have time to take it off—an' I haven't had time yet! Besides, a feller has to get his gun on before he leaves town—an' Bulldog looks to me like he's jest leavin'."

"Whew!" grunted the San Francisco man. "And they talk about our Barbary Coast! If one of you will hold my horse, I have to go in some brick building to buy something—and I'd suggest that Miss Dignan comes with me!"

Rimmy laughed.

"Oh, don't be scared—he wont do nothin'!"

He rode to the hardware store, dismounted, and tied his horse beside those of the Horseshoe Bar men. He walked quickly to the door, paused a moment, and stepped inside.

Crash!

Rimmy Bill never did know for a fact whether he got a glimpse of the gun in Bulldog's hand, or whether it was some instinct that made him throw himself to the floor. Anyway, as he fell, the bullet splintered the door scarcelv an inch above his head.

"Throw 'em up, Bulldog!" he called, jerking out his own gun.

He saw the top of Bulldog's hat above a show-case. Across at the other side of the room he could see old Pat McMahon crouched against the wall, as far as he could get from the line of fire.

"Throw 'em up, I say, Bulldog, an' I wont shoot!"

For answer there came a quick shot around the corner of the show-case. It was too quick, and so went wild.

"Well, if you wont—"

Rimmy fired three shots in quick succession. He did not wait to see the other appear around the corner; neither did he foolishly shoot at the top of the hat. Straight through the show-case he fired, about where he judged Bulldog's body would be.

There was a thud, and Bulldog Jones collapsed from behind his futile shelter. Out onto the floor he fell, but even as he fell, he raised his gun to shoot again. Once more Rimmy's gun cracked. And now Bulldog Jones lay still, for that time Rimmy had been able to take aim.

"Throw 'em up, you!"

RIMMY heard the voice behind him, and recognized it for a voice of authority. Besides, he knew that he probably was covered—that it would be suicide to turn with the gun in his hand. Always careful of his firearms, he lowered his six-shooter as far as he could, and gently dropped it to the floor, the hammer uncocked.

"Are you the sheriff?" he asked as he turned slowly, with raised arms.

"I'm that. I reckon yo're this Rimmy Bill Hadley I hear about?"

"That's me."

"Well, I saw you followin' those men in here, but didn't get here in time to stop you. What have you to say about this thing?"

"Nothin', only that I shot in self-defense."

"Oh, shore—they all say that! Was there any witness?"

Pat McMahon was coming forward.

"Witnesses! Shure, I saw it all from beginning to end. Jones an' me were standin'

at that show-case over there lookin' at horsehair cinches. We heard some one comin' in the door, an' looked up. There was this fellow with his gun in his hand, an' before we knew what was happenin' he shot at Bulldog!"

The sheriff turned to Conrad, the hardware man:

"Did you see what happened before the shooting?"

Conrad shook his head.

"I was in the back room to get some more cinches when I heard the shootin' begin. Of course I stayed there till I knew it was all over."

"Well, Hadley, things look pretty black for you. This self-defense business has been overdone a heap lately. It's time a few fellers that are too handy with their guns got their necks stretched a bit to break 'em of it, an' teach the rest to behave."

Old Jim Dignan limped forward—the riding had made his leg much worse.

"Sheriff," he began, "there's no need to lock him up. We can fix bail—"

"There'll be no bail!" said the sheriff shortly, snapping handcuffs on Rimmy.

Jane was crying softly into her handkerchief.

"Poor Jones!" murmured old Pat sentimentally. "Shot down in cold blood!"

"Well,"—the sheriff grasped Rimmy Bill's arm,—"we might as well be goin'."

"Just a minute, if you don't mind!" Drayton stepped forward.

The sheriff stopped leading Rimmy toward the door, and asked sharply:

"Well, who are you, now?"

The other held out a card:

"I'm John Drayton, of the Bureau of Criminal Identification, of San Francisco."

"Oh, I see!" The sheriff was obviously impressed, and stopped respectfully.

Drayton, in a few words, told of the discovery of the fingerprints in the gun and in the book.

"So," grunted the sheriff, "old Billy Hadley didn't kill himself after all!"

"He most certainly did not!"

"Damme, I'm glad o' that! Me an' old Billy always was friends; that's why I hate to take young Bill here in—but duty is duty."

"I just wanted permission to examine the fingers of this man,"—Drayton indicated the prostrate figure of Bulldog,—"to see if our theory is correct."

"Shore! Shore! An' if he killed old Billy—well, I don't see how I could have the heart to lock young Billy up for shootin' him!"

EVERYONE stood expectantly while the fingerprint expert bent over the figure of Jones. There was a long, expectant pause, and then Drayton slowly stood up. When he turned to the group, his face was very grave. He hesitated, and then spoke:

"I'm sorry, but his fingerprints don't resemble those in the gun at all."

"Huh!" grunted the sheriff in evident disappointment. "Then you'll have to get the fingerprints of everyone else on the Horseshoe Bar, you say?"

"It's the only way."

"Well, I'll help you myself—I want to get to the bottom of this killin' of old Billy. I'll lock this fellow up first."

He again grasped Rimmy Bill's arm. This time an interference came from a totally unexpected quarter. Old Pat McMahon pushed forward:

"Shure, wait a minute, will you—maybe I can tell you something."

Everyone stared at him. Again he spoke:

"I just wanted to say that Bulldog had his gun filed down by some feller in Prescott when he was there about two months ago—he told me himself about what a foine job it was, an' said he'd never try to file his own down ag'in if he could get a mechanic to do it for him."

The sheriff hesitated:

"That makes things uncertain—"

"But," continued old Pat, "I'll tell you the truth. I'd have told you anyway as soon as I could have got another foreman to run the outfit for me. This Bulldog Jones, here, told me he killed old Billy, an' wanted a rise in wages for doin' it. A rise in wages! For killin' the best friend I had—even if we did have some business disagreements between the outfits sometimes! Shure, I felt like shootin' Bulldog meself, but I held my mouth shut till I could get another foreman."

THE sheriff released Rimmy's arm, and stood puzzled. Into the silence came the voice of John Drayton, crisp and incisive:

"Still, I insist on fingerprinting everyone on the outfit—I'd like to begin with Mr. McMahon here—merely as a matter of form, of course!" He stepped forward, drawing a little package from his pocket.

"No—no!"

Pat McMahon had suddenly stepped

back, throwing his hands before his face, a face that had become pasty-white.

"I insist, Sheriff. You see—"

The sheriff sprang forward:

"Stop him! My God!"

Old Pat McMahon was huddled back in a corner, shivering. From a spring holster under his left armpit he had whipped a big six-shooter, and his trembling hand held it against his own temple.

"No—no!" he shrieked, his voice hoarse with terror.

The sheriff jerked out his own gun, intending to shoot the owner of the Horseshoe Bar in the arm—but he was too late. There came a crashing report, a queer, slumping thud, and old Pat McMahon was stretched on the floor, dead. The pause that followed was broken by Drayton, stepping forward to the prone figure. He picked up one of the limp hands and bent over it.

"Yes," he announced, "those are the same fingerprints I found in the gun that killed Billy Hadley. Let's have a screwdriver and take a look in this gun."

He unloaded the gun and snapped it a few times while the hardware man was getting a screwdriver.

"Much heavier pull than the other—although it seems to have been filed down a trifle."

He took the implement the hardware man handed him, and in a moment had the hard rubber butts removed.

"Just as I thought! Those are Billy Hadley's prints—this was his gun."

"But," murmured old Jim, "I don't see why he left his own gun! Why didn't he fire Billy's once, to have an empty chamber, an' leave it?"

"Because you can never tell what a coward will do," the sheriff answered. "Perhaps he was afraid that another shot would attract attention."

He paused, and spoke again:

"I don't know what to do about young Hadley, here. I hate to take him in—"

"MAY I speak a word?" A white-haired old man came forward.

"Shore, Judge! Anything you want!" the sheriff agreed deferentially.

"I was in my office, down the street on the other side. I saw this boy enter the store, here, and I am willing to swear that he was shot at as he entered—before he drew his gun."

The sheriff gasped with relief.

"Good! What had I better do, Judge?"

"Well, of course we'll have to have a hearing—as a matter of form. Meanwhile, don't you think we could let this boy go on his own recognizance?"

"Fine an' dandy!" exclaimed the sheriff heartily, unlocking the handcuffs and shaking Rimmy's hand. "Old Billy an' me always were friends, an' I'd hate like heck to lock up his nephew!"

"Yes, yes," murmured the judge, "Billy Hadley and I were partners too, for many years. Couldn't we get along without this audience, Sheriff?"

He motioned to the curious crowd that had gathered. His wish seemed to be law, for before the sheriff spoke, everyone was crowding from the store, and back into the street. Old Jim turned to them:

"Do you mind if I go now? I saw Tim Heffern goin' down the street in his rig, an' I want to catch him before he leaves town. I've a deal on for that little place o' his over on Simpson Creek."

"What!" exclaimed Rimmy. "Not quittin' me, are you—without notice?"

"Why not, son? Yo're young an' active, an' better able to run the Rockin' Rafter than I am. You don't need a foreman."

"But—but—"

"I've a little money saved, an' that place will make me a livin' for the rest o' my days. Jane an' I always was talkin' o' the time when we'd have our own outfit, an'—"

"But Dad," interrupted Jane, "I've been thinking it over. Maybe you'd better stay with the Rocking Rafter another while."

Old Jim stared at his daughter in amazement. She looked back at him innocently, and it was not until the old Judge began to chuckle that the pink color came to her cheeks. The judge winked at Rimmy, who was becoming the color of a beet.

"Dog-gone it!" gasped old Jim. "Dog-gone it all, anyway! I—I never. . . . . Why—mebbe I don't have to quit right away. I never *thought*—"

The judge turned to go, but again retraced his steps.

"My boy, you mustn't forget that your uncle and I were lifelong friends—and that I'm legally empowered to perform marriage ceremonies!"

Then, leaving Rimmy and Jane crimson-faced and standing very close to each other, the old judge winked solemnly at everyone, shook his white head slowly, and departed, chuckling, down the street.

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES

Wherein a young man gets more thrills in three days than many an "old rail" in three years.

By
C. T. Stockwell

Working on the Railroad

"LIKE the time you went firing!"

That remark, dryly delivered by my father, or perhaps an older sister, is still a very efficient squelcher of my lurid enthusiasms, although the event itself occurred several years ago. The reference, while chilling in its effect, is pleasant beside what actually happened when I went firing.

Like many boys of all times I wanted adventure, speed and change of scenery. It struck into my adolescent mind that all of these things would be found at the helm of a galloping iron horse. I longed to be a locomotive engineer. I had rather be a hog-head than head of a nation.

I knew that some railroad companies would employ boys who had reached their eighteenth year, if the parents signed a minor's release. This release absolves the railroad company from any legal responsibility to the parents in case of accident to the employee.

For a year, since I had reached that age, my parents refused to do this. It was very tragic! All of my plans and ambitions were to be thwarted by old-fashioned parental opposition. I made much of it. I stormed, nagged and begged, until at last I won my point.

I made application for position as fireman, and was sent to the doctor for examination. I passed the physical examination, including eyesight and hearing tests, easily. At home that afternoon I displayed an order to start my student trips, with more pride than I had ever known when exhibiting a report card from school. I also brought home a minor's-release form for my parents to sign.

This release had to be filed in the master mechanic's office before I was put on the pay-roll, but the lack did not interfere with the making of my student trips. That was what I was interested in. I considered the affair of the release as a mere bothersome detail to be attended to later.

I bought new overalls, cap and the indispensable bandana for my neck. Arrayed in my new uniform, I was all ready for action—and in the next three days I got plenty of it!

I was going to work on a midwestern division of a railroad which extends from Chicago to the Pacific Coast. The heaviest part of this company's freight business consists of the transportation of livestock—mostly cattle and sheep.

My first trip started Wednesday night about seven o'clock. It was late in September. For two weeks there had been unusually heavy rains in this section. Among the orders the engineer showed me were some "slow orders" over soft spots in the track. I felt very important when he handed me those orders.

We were headed west over a hundred-and-forty-five-mile division with a drag of empty stock-cars. We made several stops for water, two for coal, and took siding a few times to meet other trains.

THE fireman allowed me to put in a few fires, but would not let me work long at a time, as he was afraid I would spoil his fire. I helped him take coal and water, but most of the time was spent on the left seat box, with one of the brakemen. I ignored him as much as possible. Sometime after midnight I ignored everything and fell asleep—nature and force of habit overcame all else.

I was awakened by the fireman shaking me and saying: "You can take her now." It was getting gray in the east. I had slept about four hours on my very first trip!

"You'd ought to went brakin'," remarked the engineer, referring to my ability to sleep on the job. His remark brought on a cordial exchange of insults between himself and the brakeman, which thoroughly awakened me.

Eventually we arrived at the terminal. We left the train in the yards and went to the roundhouse, where we washed up. I was hungry and ready for bed. This was Thursday morning. The clerk in the roundhouse told the crew that they would get out the next afternoon on stock.

I ate, slept and loafed around the little railroad town until the next afternoon. While I could have gone back at any time, I decided to wait and make the return trip with the crew I came out with. We left about six o'clock that night with thirty cars of cattle. I did not particularly notice our cargo before we started, but I learned later that they were wild, long-horned Western steers.

We made much better time than we did with the drag of empties on the trip out, so much better that by midnight we had traveled over one hundred miles.

As we went over the top of a long hill the fireman said: "All right—you can have her now. We've only forty miles to go." I took her. Evidently I had absorbed some of the rudiments of firing, for I had noticeably better results than on my last attempt. After a mile or so the fireman got down and inspected the fire and said: "You are getting her all right—just watch them back corners." I was much elated.

WE rounded a curve which caused me to throw coal all over the deck from the swaying of the engine. I hadn't got my sea-legs yet. Before I recovered my balance, I was violently slammed against the back end of the boiler. I thought it was the end of everything and started to unload, but the fireman grabbed me by the arm and drew me back.

I heard the engineer say: "We've busted an air-hose, I guess."

The brakeman, who had been jolted out of his trance, picked up his lantern and stepped down into the gangway as we came to a stop.

"We're afire back there!" he exclaimed. He dropped off and started back. I looked out between the engine and tank. He was right—the train was afire!

Evidently sparks from the stack of the engine had ignited the hay in the feed-rack of a stock-car, and the draft created by our speed had caused it to spread to several others before we got stopped. The conductor or brakeman on the rear end of the train had discovered the fire and opened a valve on the train line. This had set the brakes suddenly and as a result threw me head-on against the boiler.

AS soon as possible the men on the rear cut the train in two just back of the burning cars and signaled us to go ahead. We pulled down the tracks perhaps a hundred yards and stopped again. The fire had started eight cars back from the engine. At that point the sharer of my seat-box bunk cut the train, and we moved ahead again. The burning cars were thus isolated from the rest of the train.

We, on the engine, hurried back to help liberate the endangered stock. Long before we reached the scene of the conflagration we could smell scorched hair and flesh. The night was made hideous with the din of bellowing, maddened cattle. As in a horrible nightmare I stumbled along with the others over the gravel beside the track.

Suddenly I made another alarming discovery. The members of the train-crew, and the stock-tenders in the caboose, had

opened the doors of some of the cars, and the stampeding animals freed from that inferno were headed our way. We got over the right-of-way fence without any casualties, and the crazed creatures galloped on. They did not appear to slacken their speed passing the standing locomotive.

We worked on around the blaze and came up to it from the rear. The animals were freed from all but one of the cars, the one which ignited first. There the fire had gained such headway that when we reached it we could do nothing. Some few of the cattle escaped with their lives, but most of them became entangled in the wreckage and perished.

In the other cars all the cattle escaped the fire, but a few went down with legs broken in leaping to the ground, and were trampled by the frantic herd. It would have been much worse but for the prompt action of the crew and the stock-men on the train.

Having done all we could, the conductor decided to take the head end of the train to the next station and wire in a report of the accident. We boarded the engine and started for town. I got on the job. With only eight cars we quickly gathered speed. Some one remarked: "I don't see anything of those cattle." If they maintained the speed with which they left the scene of the fire, I didn't think we would ever see them again. I was wrong.

I OPENED the door to put in another fire, and for the second time that night I collided with the boiler-head. This time the engineer had set the brakes with an emergency application. Owing to the fact that the fire door was open when the engineer shut off so suddenly, the smoke rolled up in my face, choking and blinding me.

There was much confusion. The engine jarred and swayed. Above the din somebody yelled, "Jump!" I jumped into the darkness. I never saw so much darkness, before or since.

As I left the cab, I realized that we were on some sort of trestle. In another instant I was in deep water and a long ways from home—water that was cold and swift because of the recent heavy rains. I heard more cattle bawling, and a terrific crash.

I learned afterward that the engine and three cars crossed the trestle before they turned over; one car fell into the water, while four more stayed on the track. Several of the cattle that had escaped from the fire had attempted to cross this small bridge and were trapped by stepping between the cross-timbers on the bridge, where the engine struck them and was derailed.

BUT that I learned later. What I learned a moment after the crash was that there were cattle in the water headed my way. I left there at once, swimming downstream as rapidly as possible, cussing the denim uniform which I had been so proud of. It now impeded my speed, and speed was what I craved—speed and change of scenery. Of adventure I had enough, but those damn' cattle didn't know it, and they were getting closer all the time.

After swimming at least twice across the English Channel I felt something brush my cap; I threw one arm up, and by the only good luck I had that night I grasped a limb of a tree that grew out over the water. As I went up into the branches, one of those devilish steers hit my feet with his head.

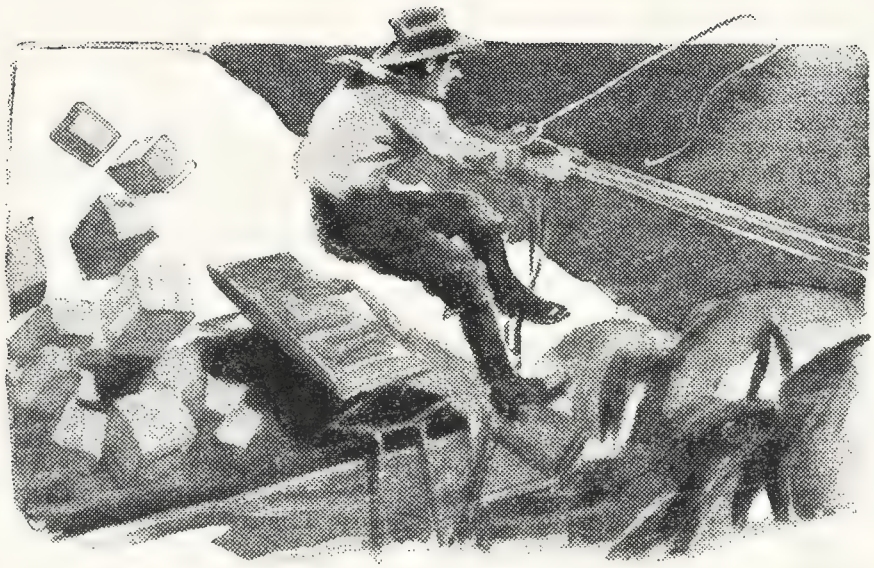
Evidently he blamed me for all his troubles; at any rate he landed about ten feet below me, came back to the foot of the tree and stayed there. He had me treed without any help, and he was soon reinforced by a dozen or so more.

I made a few faint-hearted attempts to reach the ground, but those long-horned beasts easily discouraged me, so I went to roost.

The section men found me at daybreak. After they drove the steers away, I came down off my perch, my teeth chattering. It wasn't entirely because I was cold and wet, either. I noticed several poorly suppressed grins on the faces of my rescuers, but I was too bedraggled to care. I learned afterward that the other members of the crew were badly bruised and shaken up from rolling down the embankment. I was the only one to hit the water.

SOON the relief train took us into town, where I wired my mother that I was safe. My telegram was the first she had heard of the wreck, but it was the confirmation of the fears which gave her three sleepless nights while I was gone, and finished my career as an engineman.

She flatly refused to sign the minor's release, rather to my relief. Although I have never admitted it to the family, the sight of a dashing locomotive, and tales of the wild and woolly cowpuncher, leave me cold—cold but dry.



The Dynamite Limited

By
Army Adams

When your wagon is loaded with dynamite and the horses run away — what happens!

IN 1907 the bore of the Gunnison Tunnel on the Government's Uncompahgre reclamation project in Colorado had passed the stage of unknown quantities and was being pounded steadily ahead through the granite from the east portal-heading in the Black Cañon of the Gunnison River.

Punching holes in that hard rock required lots of compressed air, and to maintain the required amount and pressure demanded much coal under the boilers which furnished the primary power. This coal, all supplies and equipment, was hauled by four- and six-horse teams from the railroad at Cedar Creek up over the high divide.

That winter a man by the name of Rayborn had the contract for hauling the coal, and my partner and I had a subcontract under him for part of it. We were using two four-horse freight outfits.

One night as I drove in rather late on my return from the power plant at east portal, Rayborn met me out on the road and asked if I'd mind taking a load of dynamite over the next day.

"Wilton" (the man having the contract for hauling the dynamite) "had a phone message from the superintendent," explained Rayborn. "Wilton didn't get over today. You know he's having tough luck with his teams this week and has got behind. Wanted to know if I could help him out. Most of the other boys are loaded up and some of them wouldn't want to haul the stuff anyway, so I aimed to catch you before you started to load. Wilton says he'll pay double freight rate for one load of six thousand pounds. Will you take it?"

"Sure—I'll take it," I told him, and swung the team off at the forks on the way to the powder magazine.

That double rate looked good to me. If anything happened and the dynamite took me to Kingdom Come, I was willing to think that that was the day set aside for me to join the Endless Caravan across the River Styx. After the horses were tended to and we had eaten supper, my partner and I loaded up his wagon with coal, put an extra side-board on mine and loaded it with "sixty per cent," this being powder carrying the highest content of nitroglycerine for extra hard rock.

NEXT morning broke clear and cold. If I live to be a hundred and ten years old, I'll never forget that day.

We had been on the road a couple of

hours before the sun climbed above the skyline ahead. Shortly after that the horses began to sweat freely and we let them take it easylike up the long, stiff grade. Winding up and out of the gulches and along the hillside we arrived at the summit of the divide around noon, my partner in the lead.

Going into east portal, when you reach that divide, the world seems to drop from under, with the smoke from the power plant far below rising like steam from the nether regions.

The ascent from Cedar Creek to this point had been selected and placed on a gradient to favor the teams going in with supplies and material; that was fine — a good road. But in looking ahead toward the river one was justified in assuming that no material was ever supposed to be taken out of there, since there had been no selection of the grade for a road other than to hang it on the walls, and let it occasionally follow for a short distance the stream of the gorge which led into the main cañon and widened out into a place big enough for a camp where it hit the river.

From the summit of the divide to the power plant the road dropped over three thousand feet in less than three miles according to the engineers. The grade was too long and too steep for the ordinary wagon brakes. The tires would become so hot that they would expand enough to leave the wheel. We could use the brakes only as far as the milk ranch which was situated in a small cove a hundred rods down the road.

My partner rounded over the hill and slammed on his brakes with me not fifty yards behind. When we reached the milk ranch we stopped to put on the rough-locks. In the summer on steep grades like this one we always used a "shoe" on each rear wheel, but now the road was as icy and slick as a greased chute and we were using a shoe-and-ring rough-lock. The horses were sharp-shod, and even with the rough-lock the wheelers had to sit back into the breeching to prevent the load from getting out of control on some of the steep pitches.

I let my partner have a safe lead, then I whistled to the horses and started. When I struck the first steep pitch I knew I was in for a wild ride. I had a big gray stallion for my off-wheeler; a good horse when he wanted to be, but able to deal out more grief to his driver than seven devils out of hell when he chose to be mean.

This was a day when he decided he would not help the nigh-wheeler hold the load. He had a jaw on him like armor-plate and a man might as well try to pull a locomotive off the track as to undertake to make him hold back if he didn't feel that way. All I could do was to nurse him along, keep the leaders out of his way and hope that the load did not get to be too much for the nigh-wheeler. If one of those rough-locks broke— The hole would be as big as an extinct volcano! I knew I never would get to see it, but I could imagine what it would look like. I had seen dynamite in action and six thousand pounds of it would make quite a crater even in that rocky cañon.

Going down a steep pitch, the rough-lock hit a boulder bedded in the rut and the wagon raised up. I thought it was going over. Right there it was a long ways to the bottom and with a hundred and twenty boxes of high per cent nitro landing on the rocks there was bound to be fireworks. I didn't have time or a chance to shift my weight without slacking the lines, and I didn't dare do that. Involuntarily I closed my eyes and held my breath for a second as the wagon hung balanced before it settled back into the road. Farther along where the grade was less steep I got the outfit halted for a breathing spell.

But not for long. It was cold in the cañon and the horses were restless. Perhaps they had a premonition of what was coming. They started; now the off-wheeler's maneuvers were tending to work him into a rage as well as myself.

I wanted to whale the devil out of him but he had me at a disadvantage. He danced sideways and a time or two I thought he was going to throw himself across the tongue into the nigh-wheeler who was having all he could do to keep the load from gaining too much momentum.

WE finally reached the place where the road swung from the south side of the stream to the north side. Here by the bridge was another flat place where the load could be stopped and my partner was waiting there. He jumped to his seat and was ready to fog it ahead on the narrow road when he saw how my wheeler was acting.

I got my four stopped, though, and climbed down to the road. My knees were shaking; whether from fear or anger, I was not sure which, but I was so mad at that off-wheeler that I was seeing red. Other men would have offered advice, but

after one look at my face, my partner held his counsel.

When I'd cooled off a bit he called out: "We're over the most of it; the rest ought to be easy—I'll go on." I nodded my head and he spoke to his team. I looked over my chains and rough-locks and everything seemed to be all right.

Once more perched in my seat I felt easier. It was not so very far now. Only this one steep pitch directly ahead, a right-hand turn and we would be onto the straight-away that led into the flat at the power plant. I had not gone twenty feet before I knew my troubles were increasing instead of diminishing and they were increasing fast. The stallion commenced to swing his head blindly and to throw his front feet in side-swiping strides. I had to let the leaders tighten up to keep the lead-bars away from his feet.

This gave the load more speed. I heard something snap; the load leaped ahead like a thing alive and I knew a chain or rough-lock had given way! I poured the lash into the leaders as I realized I'd have to outrun the load. I didn't have time to think much, for several things happened at once. I saw I couldn't escape a smashup by any manner of luck, but I grimly made up my mind that that load of disaster should never get any nearer the power plant than the bridge ahead.

INSTEAD of making the turn to the right on to the bridge I figured I could keep straight ahead into the boulders and scrub-oak. From the bridge to the bluff was about fifty or sixty feet and I thought the rock and oak might stop the layout before it reached the bluff above the creek. If not, that was as good a place as any to have the stuff blow up.

But I never got as far as the bridge. Things happened in less time than it takes to tell of it. As I yelled at the leaders and the whip bit them, the stallion lunged up and ahead into the lead-bars. Two leaps of the leaders and the stallion was thrown on his side; then the nigh-wheeler went down. This threw the leaders into a panic. They were running away and we rocked and bolted down the road, a rolling, heaving monster of potential death and destruction.

I braced myself and started to pull the leaders to the left to keep them from trying to make the turn on to the bridge. The skidding and drug wheelers jerked the left front wheel into the bank. It climbed a rock and the wagon flopped up, throwing me into the air.

The rock and brush of the roadside came hurtling up to meet me. A black pit opened up with stars flashing; the stars faded and the black pit closed over me.

WHEN I awakened I had to smile. The dynamite lay scattered around with a number of boxes broken and I was partly buried with them. After the smash the lead-team had pulled the wagon from off me and on down the road a rod or more before stopping. The wagon-box was bottom-side up ready to topple into the creek below; the rear running-gears were on the bank above the road while the front wheels and the wheel-team were all mixed together. The leaders were apparently unharmed. A knot on my head was making my head ache, but aside from that I felt all right.

I made an effort to get out from amongst the boxes, but could move only my arms. I called for help and my partner answered. He'd heard the crash and was bringing men. A stretcher was brought from the camp hospital. When they had carefully removed the boxes of powder I fell forward before anyone could catch me. Both hips were dislocated; but I was lucky at that. Within the hour the camp doctor had me limp as a rag doll from his dose of ether, and my joints in place.

I received fine treatment in the little hospital and from the folks in camp. Within thirty days I was up and around, only a limp and a few gray hairs as tokens of my ride and fall with the dynamite.

(A "shoe" in the vernacular of the freighter using wagons in a mountainous country, is a strip of flat iron in which are riveted two heavy lugs in the shape of a U for the rear wheel to rest in when the shoe is in position in the wagon track and vertically under the axle. A bolt fits through holes in the top of the side-bars of the U to keep the wheel from jumping out of the shoe on rocky roads. In the winter time, to use on the steep, icy places, a ring is made of one inch square iron, about six or seven inches in diameter, and is slipped over the snout of the shoe and is supposed to rest under the shoe and wheel at a point where the load is greatest.

The shoe is held in position by a chain which extends to a "figure 8" link caught between the reach and front axle by the king-bolt. When the ring is used in conjunction with the shoe it is termed a rough-lock. It gouges great ruts in the road, but one can readily see where such a device would retard the progress of a loaded wagon down a steep hill and what would happen on such a steep hill if the rough-lock or the chain should break.)

Nineteen Fathoms Down

By **Albert N. Hinman**

Going down in deep water after a strayed torpedo isn't just child's play—as this diver discovered.

"THAT damned torpedo is right down there," impatiently growled the gunner in charge of the diving-party. He indicated the spot by heaving an empty cigarette-box at the blob of oil which was rapidly spreading over the surface of the water and becoming iridescent in the late afternoon sunshine. "And it's up to you and Wilson to find it," he added.

"I know it's *not* right down *there*," I replied somewhat testily. "I've wallowed through the mud over a radius of more than a hundred feet under that spot and had it been there I would have found it. Wilson has been down over an hour now, covering the same ground I did, and he hasn't found it either."

"That's true too," admitted the gunner, "but those oil-blobs are coming from the torpedo, so it's down there some place. If we go back to the ship tonight without it, hell will pop—so it's up to you and Wilson to avert the explosion."

The battleship in which we were serving was flying the red pennant for exceptional gunnery efficiency during the preceding year and with the pride in our ship which is inherent with all sailormen, we all were working hard to keep it there. Her score with great guns had been exceptionally good and the torpedoes had run perfectly until the last shot of the practice. This torpedo had run true to form for about a thousand yards, when it was seen to broach and then dive to the bottom.

The practice finished, the ship had returned to her anchorage at Provincetown some twelve miles distant, leaving orders for the diving party to recover the torpedo and return to the ship in tow of a steam launch.

The path of a torpedo, by means of its wake of white foam and bubbles, is discernible for a long distance. Should it dive to the bottom through failure of some part of its delicate mechanism to function properly, its position can be determined by bubbles of escaping air and later, after the air has been exhausted, by the oil-blobs coming to the surface from the engine oil supply. It was these oil-blobs that the gunner was watching. The monetary value of a torpedo runs into thousands of dollars, but there were other considerations that made its recovery imperative. A lost torpedo meant that some place in the score a zero factor would enter, and zero multiplied by anything at all would still be zero. Also no score could be computed until the torpedo was found or officially given up as lost. Hence the gunner's remarks about hell popping.

FOR two hours I had searched the bottom in the vicinity of the rising oil-blobs. After getting only negative information, I had been hauled to the surface weary, with my face bleeding from ruptured capillaries. The oil-blobs which came to the surface showed beyond a doubt that the torpedo was down there some place—but where?

"Coming up," sang out Turner, who was

standing in the stern sheets of the boat tending Wilson's air-hose and lifeline. "A little slower on the pump now, and steady."

"I'll be darned if that torpedo is within fifty miles of here," Wilson said after his helmet had been removed and the assistants were helping him out of his mud-covered dress. "It seems to me that I have crawled through every foot of mud on the bottom of Cape Cod Bay and I can't find a trace of it!"

"I stayed down as long as I could," he remarked apologetically as he watched me kick off my shoes and start to get into the dress, "but the tide is running strong down there now and going against it in the mud soon gets your wind."

"My head is about to split open now," I replied. "I don't know how long I'll be able to stick it out. Not long perhaps—but the torpedo is down there some place and I may stumble onto it."

"I've a hunch," said the gunner, "that the current is running in different directions at different depths and that the oil-blobs are coming up at quite a distance from the torpedo. When you get to the bottom, I'll guide you to a place where the bubbles from your exhaust air and the oil-blobs come up together and then you should be pretty close to it. You'd better go against the tide first."

THE sun was low in the west as I swung over the stern of the boat and stood on the short ladder while the straps of the eighty-pound lead belt were slung over my shoulders and the helmet secured to the breastplate.

"All equipment in place and checked?" inquired the gunner.

"O. K.," came the reply from the gunner's mate.

"Signals," said Turner, and I repeated them mechanically: "On the lifeline: one tug—all right; two—more slack; three—haul me up. On the air-hose: one—more air; two—less air; three—haul in the slack. Emergency signal: four on the lifeline and four on the air-hose—I am fouled and need assistance. Special signals: four—go against the tide; five—with the tide; six—right; seven—left."

"Check," said Turner.

The pungent smell of the vinegar on the face-plate seemed to ease my aching head a bit and when the *purr-r-purr-r-purr-r* of the air-pump had started and the one slap on top of my helmet told me that everything was ready, I grasped the descending line, swung off the ladder and rapidly lowered myself to the bottom.

As I stood there in the utter darkness to rest for a few minutes and to catch my breath, I began to realize that I was more tired than I had thought. The lead-soled shoes seemed unusually heavy and my shoulders sagged under the supporting straps of the weighted belt. Only by holding onto the descending line could I avoid being swept away by the strong flood tide. The taste of blood on my lips indicated that capillaries had again been ruptured by the sixty pounds of air-pressure per square inch necessary for me to breathe and to keep the sea water from entering my dress.

However, I resolved to stay down as long as I could and cover as much ground as possible. Getting down on all fours, I let go the descending line and began crawling over the bottom against the tide, stopping every few yards to rest and to get my breath, until a signal on the lifeline sent me working to my right across the tide. I was making better progress in this direction when suddenly I received a shock which nearly burst my eardrums and sent stars dancing before my eyes. My arms and legs gave way beneath me and I lay gasping for breath, my helmet half buried in the soft mud. What could have happened? The *purr-r-purr-r-purr-r* of the air-pump continued steadily and the air still felt fresh on my face.

Struggling to my knees I gave the lifeline one sharp tug. The answering jerk which nearly lifted me to my feet told me that everything was all right in the boat. Possibly a near-by destroyer had dropped a depth charge for practice. Anyway, I would find out when I reached the surface—I had no time to stay there wondering.

AS I started forward once more, I met with an obstruction and as I carefully put out one hand and felt of it, I shouted with joy. It was the torpedo! Diving at a sharp angle it had buried itself; only about three feet of the tail projected out of the mud. It was this I had hit with my helmet, the impact of metal making a deafening roar inside my dress and the unexpectedness of the blow nearly stunning me in my weakened condition. Here was luck, both good and bad. The torpedo had been found, but it would take many hours of hard work to dig it out of the mud. Salvage that day was out of the question, but

a line could be attached to it and buoyed. Finding it tomorrow would be simple.

Sitting in the mud astride the torpedo to preclude the possibility of losing it in the darkness, I gave five sharp tugs on the lifeline. That would tell Turner that the torpedo had been found. A strong line would be bent onto the bight of my lifeline, I would haul it down to me, make it fast to the tail and then my part of the work, for that day at least, would be over.

After what seemed an eternity I received the signal to haul away, and I began hauling on the lifeline. How my head hurt! My breath was coming in short gasps and red spots were floating in front of my eyes. By its viscosity I knew that blood was mixed with the perspiration that streamed down my face.

Now I had the buoy-line. After making the end of it fast to the tail, I cast it loose from my lifeline, gave it a sharp tug and felt my heart give an extra thump as the slack was hauled up and the line grew taut. Now I could signal to be hauled up!

SLOWLY and deliberately, I gave three distinct tugs on the line and felt it slip through my hands as it was being hauled up. Suddenly the line grew taut, but there was no resultant tautness on my body. Also there was still slack across my knees in the mud. Following the taut part down with my hands I discovered the reason—the coils of the lifeline as I hauled it down had wound around the tail of the torpedo and were now hopelessly tangled around the rudders and propellers. The situation was bad, but not hopeless. I would signal for a little slack in the lifeline, cut it loose from the torpedo, make the end fast around my body and signal to be hauled up.

As the lifeline slacked, I hauled down a few feet of it, made the bight fast to my belt and felt at my hip for the sheathknife which is an essential part of a diver's equipment. But it wasn't there! In the hurry to get me down, they must have made a mistake and put the strap over the wrong shoulder, and it would, of course, be on the other hip. But it wasn't! I had no knife! It had been forgotten—and I was nineteen fathoms beneath the surface hopelessly fouled to a buried torpedo. Frantically I felt among the coils of the tangled line in an endeavor to clear the mess, and then—oblivion. . . . .

When next I remembered anything, the huge, lustrous stars overhead seemed so near that one could almost touch them with a boathook. A death-like stillness prevailed and I experienced a rolling sensation. I tried to move my body but found I could not even raise my hands. Where was I? How did I get loose from the torpedo? I wasn't dead, because I was breathing. Then the stars became dim; again I lapsed into unconsciousness.

IT was morning and the sun was shining through an open port when next I opened my eyes. I found the ship's doctor bending over me, asking me how I felt.

"Pretty good," I replied; "but what happened? I was fouled to the torpedo without a knife. Next I woke up and looked at huge, misty stars but I couldn't move. I seemed to be rolling from side to side but everything was quiet, not a sound of any kind. I thought I was dead, until I discovered that I was breathing. After that I don't remember anything until just now. Who cut me loose?"

"The gunner will tell you all the details after breakfast," replied the doctor, "but in general this is what happened. When you stopped answering signals they tried to pull you up, but when they couldn't budge you, they knew that you were fouled. In the hurry to send Wilson down to help you, they tore the neckpiece of his suit and the water was too deep to dive with just the helmet. As it would take about three hours to get another dress from the ship, heroic measures were necessary, so the steam launch was made fast to the diving boat and after a jerk or two, she pulled the torpedo out of the mud. Both you and the torpedo came to the surface together. When they had cut the dress off you, they found that you were unconscious. Not being able to arouse you, they wrapped you in a blanket and brought you back to the ship. I put you to bed here in the sick-bay, where you'll stay for a few days."

"But where was I when it was so quiet?"

"Wrapped up in the blanket in the boat; and as for the quiet, you were probably stone deaf. I'm surprised that you aren't deaf now. It usually turns out that way."

"But that torpedo was at least eighteen feet in the mud," I exclaimed. "How—"

"The gunner said the mark of the mud on it was about that far," interrupted the doctor. "Now eat your breakfast and go to sleep."

Incidentally the ship flew the efficiency pennant for another year.

THE 1928 Buffalo Hunt

By

R. D. McCrum

Here's an anachronism for you: an Indian, in an airplane, trying to shoot a buffalo with a bow and arrow.

SHORTLY after the war one of the largest ranches in Texas was sold. The transfer was made an excuse for a real, old-fashioned barbecue with some modern improvements. Everybody in the state was invited, and I thought after I got there that all invitations had been accepted.

I was flying one of the old army training planes about the country, and was one of three pilots engaged to attend and give any and all who wanted them, free hops in the planes. It was to be a memorable occasion, and it was—for me.

A number of Indians were on hand in their war-paint and feathers. They were extremely picturesque, and I got quite a thrill out of thinking of the days when their ancestors and mine had struggled for possession of the very ground that was now being sold. One of the few remaining herds of buffalo is on this ranch, and they fitted perfectly into the picture of frontier days conjured up by the Indians.

Arrangements had been made for one of the Indians to shoot a buffalo in the good old fashion that we read about. The buffalo was to be turned into a pasture in front of the ranch-house, the Indian was to gallop out on his pony, and with a well placed arrow was to bring the buffalo down. He was equipped with the necessary weapons, the spectators were herded outside the pasture, and everything was all set.

At the last minute one of the committee members had a sudden rush of blood to the head and proposed that the buffalo be shot from one of the airplanes instead of from a horse! I was elected as the pilot and after some very natural hesitation I agreed to the scheme, for it looked as though it wouldn't last long, and would free me from the duty of taking passengers. The idea was that I could keep on the ground but close enough to the buffalo to give the Indian a killing shot.

I ROLLED the ship into the field, backed it up to the gate where the buffalo was to enter and announced ready. The Indian who was to act as executioner was brought out and a gorgeous sight he was. All paint and war-bonnet and fringed buckskins, he was nothing if not noble looking. He carried a long bow and one arrow —testimony to the committee's opinion of his prowess. I tried to ask him if he had ever been up, but he couldn't or wouldn't understand, so I hoisted him into the rear seat. I tried to show him how to kneel

on the seat and shoot over the right side, and warned him not to interfere with the controls. He grunted a few times, got himself thoroughly tangled up with his bow and arrow, and we were ready.

The buffalo came into the pasture head down and running wild. I didn't know before that a buffalo could make such time but I certainly found out. I opened the throttle slightly and we moved out after him. He ran for a little way straight down the field and of course we gained on him at once. We were almost alongside him where the Indian would have a good shot when he suddenly wheeled almost directly in front of the ship. I shoved the throttle quickly ahead to swing away from him, and heard a wild war-whoop behind me. I thrilled at the sound, for I had read many times of the bloodcurdling yells of the Indian hunter on the chase as well as on the warpath. I looked back to get a glimpse of the real thing.

THE noble hunter was halfway out of the ship and doing his best to get farther. His feather head-dress was canted over one ear in the blast from the propeller and he was clutching his bow with a death grip. The arrow was gone—flung away or dropped, probably, for I don't believe he ever shot it. I grabbed for him, for I was afraid he would be hurt if he went over the side at the rate we were moving. I managed to hold him and turned again to see what had become of the buffalo. He had put on an extra spurt and was tearing alongside of us and gaining a little. How that buffalo could run!

I reached for the throttle to cut the motor, for the shoot was hopelessly off now. I just touched it when the buffalo again turned toward us. Again I opened up, this time "giving her the gun" in earnest. We struck a slight bump on the ground and the old ship leaped awkwardly into the air, the wing sliding over the buffalo's back.

We were flying now, and the Indian yelled again, but this time I had no illusion as to why. I turned just in time to stop another leap, and with a strong jerk pulled him down into the seat. He thrust one foot against the rudder bar and the old ship went around in a skid that almost blew my head off and canted his feathers over the other ear. I managed to swing the ship around and we went into a vertical bank not fifty feet from the ground while I tried to kick the rudder loose from his foot. I turned him loose, of course, and instantly he released the rudder and we shot toward the ground in a side-slip that almost finished us before I could pull out. The Indian tried once more to jump, but we came out of the bank in a dive and I jerked the nose up sharply, whereupon he sat down with some force. We were almost over the crowd and headed away from the field, and I made up my mind to get back and get rid of that Indian as quickly as possible.

We were flying pretty, now, but the Indian was not satisfied. He wanted out, and he made another effort that left no doubt as to his intention. I barely managed to get the fringe of his buckskin coat that time, but it held and I breathed once more. Somehow I worried the old tub around and headed back toward the field.

The buffalo had decided to go home, and he chose as his exit the gate where he had come in. He came tearing back across the field with more speed, even, than he had gone; but of course I did not see him until I was almost back myself. I had had enough of buffaloes and Indians, however, and was determined to land. I thought I could dodge the buffalo—he looked small in that pasture, and I kept on. I turned the Indian loose for a moment to close the throttle, and then grabbed him again before he could jump.

We slid down over the heads of the crowd, the Indian still making frantic efforts to get away, and the buffalo still headed for home, and I still determined to land. I pulled up just over the crowd to get farther out in the field to land when the Indian decided that the next best place was down inside the fuselage. Accordingly he dived. He jammed the stick forward and the ship promptly dived with him. The buffalo couldn't dive and we all arrived at the same place at the same time. With all his faults, I must say that buffalo made an excellent shock-absorber.

I lost two teeth but was otherwise unhurt. The ship was a pretty bad wreck but not as bad as the buffalo. I crawled out and looked for the Indian. I was afraid he was not hurt and my worst fears were realized, for he was sounding off again with that war-whoop. It was a little muffled, however, for the rear cockpit was folded neatly over his head, effectually trapping him inside. We pried him out and he went away without stopping to say good-by.

The buffalo was good eating, but a trifle too expensive for me to enjoy.

The Riot Call

By
Lee Shassere

This is a classic in the annals of one metropolitan police department—with a laugh at the end of it.

POLICE headquarters was ominously silent. Desk-sergeant Frank Voelker lolled back in his swivel chair and blew little smoke rings from his cigar toward the ceiling while a sleek-looking little "ambulance-chaser" watched the rings break apart as they drifted upward.

Captain of Police Harvey Jones and I were deadlocked in a game of checkers that was painstakingly being played. The outcome of the game would decide the championship of the City Hall. It was a case of police reporter *versus* Police Department, and I had solemnly vowed to win the toga for the honor and the glory of the press.

Suddenly the desk-sergeant's telephone bell jangled. Captain Jones and I exchanged glances. We knew that all patrolmen on duty had reported in several minutes ago and therefore the call meant that something was going on.

"Hello!" answered Voelker. "What's that? They are, eh? Kill him? No? Well, that's good. We'll get 'em up right away!"

Voelker swung around from the phone and came into the captain's office.

"Sheriff Cannon and his men are being shot up over on Ninth Street," announced Voelker. "They went up to serve a writ of restitution on that Phillips woman, and she's barricaded herself in and refused to come out. Chase, who I was talking to, thinks she's got her men inside ready to start the fireworks. Cannon tried to enter the house, but she shot through the door at him and cut him up pretty good. They want the riot-squad right away!"

Captain Jones pressed a button on the side of his desk and taking a small receiver from the hook of the office telephone, waited. Soon there came an answering ring to his signal.

"Cronin, get the men inside right away!" Jones cried through the telephone transmitter. "Tell 'em it's a riot call."

A minute later six policemen were crowded into the Captain's office. They appeared bright-eyed at the prospect of getting into action, but the brightness faded a bit when Jones swung open a door of a closet that housed the riot equipment.

Each man was handed a sawed-off shotgun and a half-dozen shells. Then they were presented with tear-bombs, and next Jones handed each a heavy metal vest that was supposed to stop any kind of bullet.

The men donned their vests, slung their shotguns under their arms and started toward the "barn," as the huge building that housed the police automobiles was called.

Miller, police reporter for the *Tribune,*

hurried after me and piled in beside me in my little flivver.

"Looks as if we're going to see some action!" he cried.

"Plenty of it, Miller. Have we got time to make the last edition?"

Miller consulted his watch. "It's one-twenty," he said. "We'll have to hustle to get our stuff in by dead-line."

"Isn't the Phillips woman doing some bootlegging up there?"

"I'll say she is. Got one of the biggest joints in town."

We swung down Fourth Street in the wake of the two police cars. Soon we were a few feet behind them and tearing along at a terrific rate of speed. The sirens on the police machines were working in perfect unison, and gave ample warning to any drivers that might be in the way. It was about two miles to the scene of the shooting, and the police-cars, trailed by my diminutive flivver, made the run in record time.

Police-like, the cops drove their cars up before the house and scrambled out. I parked my car a hundred feet or so from the scene of action, and Miller and I swung down the street in search of news.

ACROSS the street from the Phillips house we found the neighbors in a state of panic and were able to learn a few details from them: It seemed the owner of the house objected to the bootleggers making a dive out of his place and asked Mrs. Phillips to vacate. She refused, and the owner took out a writ of restitution. Mrs. Phillips refused to honor the writ and ordered the sheriff and his men to vacate the premises.

Refusing, the sheriff had sought to arrest the woman, but received a bump in the nose when Mrs. Phillips slammed the door in his face.

Sheriff Cannon had then attempted to break in the door and Mrs. Phillips had sent a charge of buckshot through the door. The minion of the law had narrowly missed being wounded and splinters from the shattered door had struck him in the face.

Following Cannon's unsuccessful attempt to enter the house, Deputy Sheriff Joe Chase had gone to the rear of the dwelling and sought to enter. He had been warned by Mrs. Phillips to forsake his idea before his health was impaired by buckshot, and Chase had promptly obeyed. This resulted in the police riot-squad being called; and led by Cronin, the officers had made a sensational dash to the scene of action.

Cronin, who had commanded soldiers in France, understood the necessity of strategy. He placed two men at the rear of the house, and stationed two in front. Then, with another policeman, he started forward toward the porch.

He was met on the porch by Cannon and Chase, who explained the lay of the land and pointed out the dangers of attempting to force the door. Cannon exhibited his bleeding face as a warning to Cronin.

"I think there's half a dozen men in there with her, and they'll shoot on sight," said Cannon. "It's going to take a lot of nerve to get 'em out of there."

CRONIN looked at the shattered door, fingered his shotgun and started forward. He halted before the door and raising his fist, pounded three times upon the portal.

"Open up in there, or my men'll come in and pull you out," he called.

His answer was in the form of buckshot that whizzed through the top of the door a few feet over his head. Cronin, a firm believer that discretion is the better part of valor, fled the porch, while his assistant, Sheriff Cannon and Deputy-sheriff Chase followed after.

Miller and I walked across the street and stood peering up at the house. It was a two-story affair, and I think that Miller was turning over in his mind the idea of scaling the porch and entering a second-story window and then attacking the enemy from above.

I sensed his plan and immediately shook my head.

"If you think you're going up there, you'd better get it out of your head right away," I told him. "They'd only pink you for your efforts. Let the cops do the fighting."

Just then the scream of a police siren came to our ears and the police emergency car drew up at the curb; out of the car stepped little Lieutenant Harry Clancy.

NOW, Clancy, as his name implies, was Irish and a fighter of the first water. He had figured in most of the police shooting scrapes during the past ten years, and I think he was the only member of the police-force that the crooks and bootleggers of the town had any respect for.

Clancy came forward, his officer's cap pulled down low over one eye. "What the hell's wrong here?" he inquired.

Cannon laughed nervously and jerked a thumb toward the house.

"Old lady Phillips refused to heed a writ of restitution I had," he explained. "She and her men are barricaded in there and refuse to come out or let us come in."

Clancy sneered.

"A hell of a nerve she's got! Remember, she's the dame that I had trouble with on Second Street a few years ago? The old hellion tried to resist that time, too, but we went right in and got her. Tried to shoot me, but I sure laid the law down to her good and plenty."

His little speech over, Clancy stepped forward and ascended the porch steps. As he made ready to knock at the door, Cronin and Cannon sprang up the steps and grabbed him by the arm. They pulled him away from the door and backed him to the edge of the porch.

"They'll shoot right through at you, Harry," they warned him. "It's suicide to try to get in there!"

CLANCY jerked himself free from their grasp and stepped forward again. He halted before the door.

"Hey, you in there!" he shouted. "Lay off the shootin' or I'll come in there and kick hell out of you! Come on and open up this door."

We all waited fearfully.

There was a moment's silence, and then from within came a woman's voice.

"Is that you, Mr. Clancy?"

"Yes, it's Clancy—and I'll make things hot for you this time unless you open this door!"

THERE came a scraping at the door, and we all jumped back out of the line of fire—all except Clancy, who stood before the door with his arms folded as if daring the occupants of the house to shoot.

Suddenly the shattered door was pushed open, and Mrs. Phillips stepped out on the porch. A huge shotgun was held in the crook of her arm and bobbed up and down dangerously as she walked toward Clancy.

Mrs. Phillips was a large woman and towered above Clancy by several inches.

"I surrender, Mr. Clancy!" she cried. "There aint another man in the world that could bluff me but you."

Clancy pushed his cap back.

"Where's the rest of your men?" he inquired, and his eyes bored into those of the cowed woman. "If they try to get away, I'm damned if I don't fill 'em full of lead!"

Mrs. Phillips shook her head.

"There was no one else in there but me, Mr. Clancy," she said.

Clancy's big blue Irish eyes snapped. He looked as if he was about ready to do murder, and Mrs. Phillips cringed.

"You mean that it's been you that's raised all this roar up here?" cried the police officer.

"Why, I guess it was, Mr. Clancy."

Mr. Clancy stepped forward. One hand reached out and grabbed the shotgun that the woman held under her arm. The other hand descended upon the side of Mrs. Phillips' cheek with a resounding slap.

"There, you hell-cat!" he cried. "Don't ever let me catch you doing anything like this again. You hear me?"

Miller and I had just enough time to get back to our papers with the story. It wasn't much of a yarn after all.

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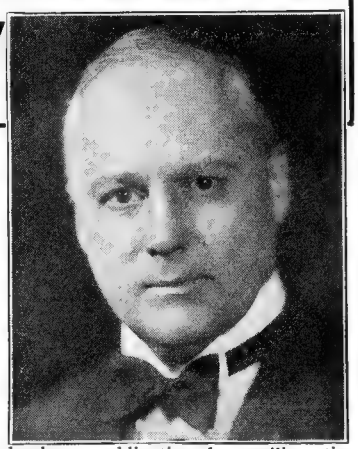

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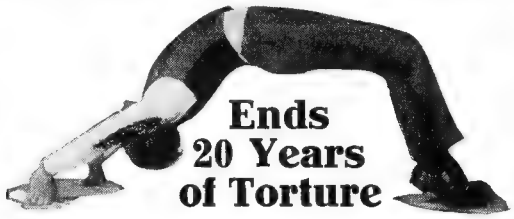

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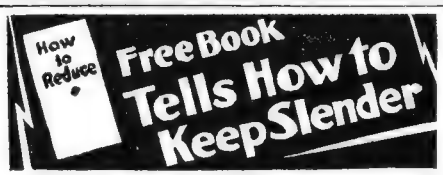

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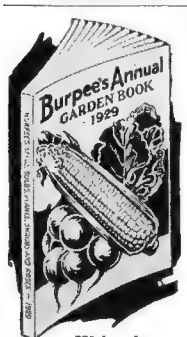

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The cars in the oval all look exactly alike at first glance. They are not all alike. One is different from all the others. There is a real difference. Something is purposely left off all the other cars but this one. The difference may be in the fenders, bumper, nameplate, radiator or top. The one that is "different" is the real Buick Sedan I am giving away in addition to three other cars in my great friendship advertising campaign. You may be the one who will find it
AND WIN BUICK SEDAN OR $1800.00 CASH
4 sedans and 28 other prizes totaling over $5,000.00. 32 prizes and duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. If you can find the "different" auto you may be the one to get this great prize.
Certificate for $480.00 to apply on grand prize sent immediately as below if you find the "different" car.
Immediate quick action—no delay—we send certificate for $480.00 to add to the first prize at once if you win and directions for getting Buick Sedan. We spend over $150,000.00 this way each year to advertise our products.
NO MORE PUZZLES TO SOLVE. No lists of words to make or write or any other puzzles. This is all. Everyone rewarded if actively interested. No cost or obligation. Nothing to buy now, later, or ever. Just send the number of the "different" auto in a letter or on a post card. That's all, send no money.
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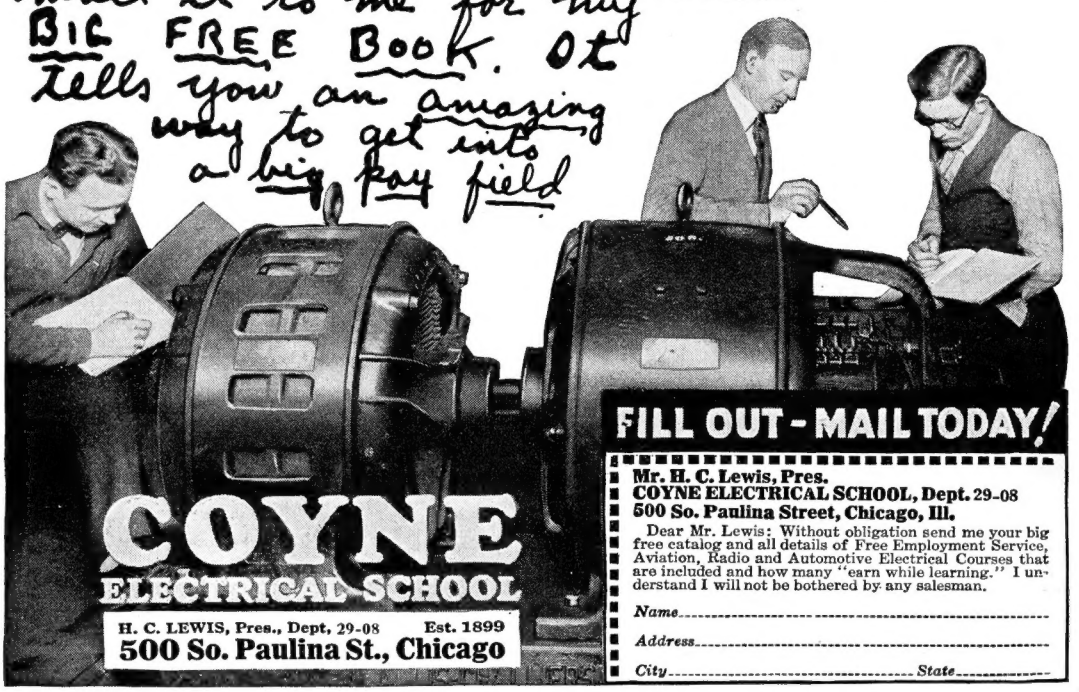

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